

THE  
**LONDON READER**  
of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1378.—VOL. LIII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 28, 1889.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[“LET ME GO!” THE WOMAN SAID, AND THEN LAID HER WHITE TEETH TO HER RESCUER’S DETAINING HAND.]

THE EYES OF THE PICTURE.

CHAPTER I.

SHE stands there in the dock like a hunted, wild animal that has turned to bay; her hands hang in front of her clenched; her dark eyes rove round the court defiantly from under her bent brows. She does not lift her head either; she holds it down, so that the movement of her eyes has something furtive in it, as if defiance had not all its own way; and shame was there, too.

What is she there for, this mere girl? She does not look one of that unhappy class to whom a police court is often no new scene. Through all the meanness of her garments, shabby to the last degree, through all the deathly pallor of her sunken cheek, the hard scorn on her lip, you could not place her in this lowest depth.

She is not defiant only, she is despairing, too. She is shrinking in her very soul from her ignoble surroundings.

The tangled masses of her fair hair escape from beneath the rusty black bonnet. She tries to smooth them into order with an uncertain, restless action. The fingers are slender and white-skinned—not the hand of the ordinary occupants of the dock.

What story—one of a thousand in the huge mass of misery that fills this great city—will she tell the benign-looking magistrate, who, as he looks at the prisoner before him, can scarcely repress an exclamation.

A policeman states the charge—attempted suicide,—and in a matter-of-course way,—it is a daily task almost to him—recounts how the prisoner had tried to fling herself from the river steps on the Embankment, and a gentleman had caught her just in time.

“Suicide!” says the magistrate. “Was she sober?”

“Quite sober, your worship.”

“Is the gentleman here?”

A tall man, young, well dressed, plainly well-born, stands forward, and bows slightly to the presiding genius of the court.

He noticed the prisoner first lounging by the wall, he says, in a refined, sweet-toned

voice. His attention was attracted by her manner, which was that of a person who scarcely knew what she was doing. He watched her. She went to the top of the steps and looked round to see if she was observed. There was no one about just then but a few children and himself.

She went further down, and he followed her. She stood on the lowest step, and had just flung out her arms to spring off, when he seized her. The policeman then came up.

“What reason had you for trying to take your life?” says the magistrate, mildly. He could not, for the life of him, speak in any other fashion to this young, miserable-looking thing.

“I didn’t want to live.”

An answer short to rudeness; the voice hoarse and faint, yet with soft cadences in it somewhere.

“What is your name?”

“I have none.”

“She wouldn’t give no name nor no address, neither, your worship,” says the policeman.

"Are you married? You have a ring, I see."

Her cheek is dyed scarlet. Such a look as leaps from those hollow eyes!

Her head sinks; she is silent.

"Where is your husband?" the magistrate asks. "I suppose, like many a foolish girl, you have had a quarrel with him? Is he unkind to you?"

"Yes."

"I think I must remand you, to find out a little more about you, unless you will give me your name, so that I can send for your husband; and if you will go home quietly, and promise not to try such a mad, foolish thing again—"

"I've no home; I've no name," she says, desperately. "I'll go back again, and fling myself in that water! What did he stop me for? I wanted to be dead! I'm not grateful for the life he's saved!"

She flings a glance of passionate accusation at the man who had rescued her, as she had done when he had grasped her on the river's brink.

She had struggled to be free, looking up at him darkly, angrily, indignantly—a look utterly pathetic in a creature so young, so fragile.

"Let me go," she had said, and when his hold had tightened, had bent her head down and laid her white teeth to his hand. He has left all that out in his story. He has told it baldly, but he has not forgotten.

"I shall send you to be taken care of for a week," the magistrate says. "And I shall ask the chaplain to see you. I hope you will listen to him. At your age you cannot mean all you say. You will think differently in a few days."

The policeman at her side lays his hand on her arm to lead her away. She shakes him off haughtily, as if she were a queen and he a lackey.

He is good-humoured, and perhaps pities her, not believing much in that ring she wears, and contents himself with keeping close to her as they leave the dock.

At the door leading into the narrow passage, a gentleman comes hurriedly from another door—the same who has been in court.

"I may speak to your prisoner a minute, policeman?" he says.

"Certainly, sir," answers the man, respectfully.

The young man turns to the girl.

"Is there no way I can help you?" he says. "You need tell me nothing, give no name; but there must be some way I can aid you."

She looks up at him in that sullen, furtive way that shows a habit of fear and mistrust.

"You can't help me," she says, "no one can. If you'd wanted to help me you'd have let me drown myself. I will do it yet! If Heaven would kill me as I stand, that would be mercy. But men are never merciful!"

"My poor girl!" says the soft, deep, pitying tones.

Her large eyes, dry and burning, go to the handsome face, sweet with a strong man's tenderness. Her lips quiver, her voice comes choking.

"Don't be kind to me, don't!" she says.

She seems struggling against a gentler mood. Her eyes grow misty as if with unshed tears, her head droops.

"I don't know all I say," she whispers. "I am not ungrateful!" Her hardness is melting against herself before the sunshine of loyal pity and sympathy. She stoops suddenly and seizes his right hand, pressing her lips on it with passionate fervour. He feels her hot tears on it, and hears the muttered words, "Forgive me; Heaven bless you!"

And then he is standing alone in the dark passage, and shudders as he hears without the sound of horses' hoofs and wheels.

He still sees the eyes that had flashed up into his face a whole world of unuttered feeling. They shine like stars through the sorid gloom.

What price had that right hand of his opened when it dragged her from death? What further pages will it turn, or is the book closed to him on this side the grave?

## CHAPTER II.

In the early hours of a spring day, when honest men were going out to their work, and dishonest ones skulking back to the wretched roofs that hid them during the day, a girl sat alone in a room in Penfold-rents, Blackfriars.

The room was of the poorest, and not only poor but dirty. The girl was a startling incongruity in that dingy hole,—although her dress was a rusty black garment that had long passed the stage of respectable poverty, and her beautiful fair hair was hanging in a tangled mass on her shoulders.

It did not matter; the marks of gentle birth were in her refined delicate features, in the pose of her head, in her movements, in the shape and texture of her hands, and the way she used them. Some terrible fate had dragged her down—she had never been born to this degradation. She was evidently watching, as she had probably watched all night, and Heaven knows how many nights before this; yet when a step sounded outside, the anxiety in her face gave way, not to the faintest gleam of pleasure, but to a certain relief, mixed with a very decided fear.

A man came in, a handsome, dissipated looking man, whose original position within certain limits it would have been difficult to assign. He was plainly not born of the classes that live in Penfold-rent, but it was not so plain whether he had been born a gentleman, or just short of one.

"What?" he said, stopping short after banging the door behind him, "past six, and no life? Upon my soul, you're a lazy one, Violet!"

The girl made no excuse—indeed said nothing at all, but made movement to remedy her neglect.

"You've been sitting up all night, have you?" said the man, laying hold of her as she passed him.

"She stood still, pale.

"Eh?"

"Didn't I tell you not to? You know I have it, and then to have nothing ready after all."

"I couldn't sleep."

"Why not? Did you think I had got run over or drowned myself? I don't imagine either of those things would rob you of the power to sleep."

She shook off his hand and went to the fireplace. Not now, she thought; perhaps once they would, barely a year ago, and a few scalding tears fell on the wood she was putting in the fireplace. She was so young, almost crushed, but she took care the man did not see those tears.

"I'm sick of it," he said, watching her deft movements. "I suppose you'd tell people you were mightily ill-used, and it was all my fault. I wonder what's to make a fellow care to have a decent home with a girl like you in it, always down-hearted, never a smile, and with no more idea of managing than a baby."

"You should have let me be, then!" she retorted, with spirit. "You knew I wasn't brought up to servant's work, but I didn't mind it once, and I could put heart into it. It isn't I who've failed."

"I suppose it is I, then?" he sneered.

"You can answer that yourself."

"Well, be quiet," he said, with sudden fierceness. "You drive me mad, Violet!" She gave a bitter little smile to herself as she put a broken kettle on the fire, but did not open her lips, and silence reigned till she announced shortly,—

"Breakfast is ready."

During this meal she sat apart in the

window. To her husband's rough demand whether she was going to starve herself more than the need, she answered she did not want anything. And indeed to have swallowed even a drop of coffee would have choked her.

Edgar Marsden did not concern himself further with her. What there was to eat he ate; glancing often at the still-dark figure in the corner, sometimes smiling to himself as a man does when he thinks he has achieved some clever stroke. The task he had set himself would have appalled many men not reckoned much better than he, but his equanimity was not much disturbed.

"Violet," he said, "I'm going out again directly, but first I want to speak to you."

She turned towards him heavy, uninterested eyes.

"Well?"

Some new demand to lend herself to his lying ways, to his specious cheats—demands she had always refused, sending her soul in the effort, shrinking in quivering fear from the ill-usage, not of hand but of words, but preserving her stainless truth in an atmosphere of shameless falsity.

"I think I've heard of something that may set me on my feet again," said Marsden, lounging before her with his hands in his pockets.

"Have you? What is it?"

"Oh, it won't affect you, my dear, so you needn't blanch those pretty cheeks of yours—I should think they were white enough already. I suppose it never enters your head I can get money honestly?"

"You could, I don't think you would," she said, quietly. "You think nothing of things I call dishonest."

"You're altogether too good to live," said he again, smirking. "Men are not quite so squeamish as you women. You've always been in my way, Violet, with your fine-drawn samples. You could have helped me if you had chosen in many ways. Don't lay it all to my door that you're in rags."

"I'd rather be in rags than stain my soul," said she, laying her face against the window-lintel near her.

"Well, you've just cut your own throat, that's all," said he, coolly. "A bold, sensible girl that would have been some use to me I'd have stuck to, but you're only an expense, without doing a hand's turn for me. So I must put an end to it."

"What do you mean?" said the girl, lifting her head quickly. There was no listlessness about her now.

"Why, we've got to go separate ways. You'd make an eternal fuss about what I'm going to do, and altogether would hamper me, so I'm just going to cut the concern."

"To leave me!" she said.

"It's as broad as it's long. You're too saint-like to consent to share the gains I hope to get. I don't think you would quite approve of them."

"But, Edgar," said the girl, breathlessly, "I don't understand you—how am I to live?"

"As you can. It's no business of mine!"

"Heaven knows I'd have made my own living before this if I could have done it," she said, "but who would take me—not even as a servant."

"There's the workhouse!"

He said it smiling.

"That's nonsense," she said, "you must be jesting. For one thing you know I'd rather die in the street. No, Edgar, tell me you do not mean all you have said. I don't think you can mean it."

"I do, indeed—never was more serious in my life."

She sprang up, white, passionate.

"But you dare not!" she said. "I have a right to help. Wretched as we have been, cruel as you are to me, I still have my rights. You cannot drag me from a home where I was honoured if not happy, and fling back all obligations in my face. I am still—Heaven help me!—your wife!"

"My wife—h'm!" he said, looking down with an indescribable smile.

Her father or brother—had she had either—would have struck him down for that look. Her blood turned like ice in her veins. Then her scorn and passion at his insult overcame her deadly fear.

"Coward!" she said, through her teeth, clutching her small hands till she hurt them.

"Hard words break no bones," said he, easily. "I'll exonerate you entirely. You didn't know. If you'd agreed quietly to my scheme, it's possible I might have said nothing more; but, as a matter of fact, you'll find you are mistaken."

His eyes shifted restlessly.

Even he had some reluctance to speak out, half in fear what she might do, half because she stood there as if turned to stone, with wide, staring, dilated eyes.

"Don't look like that!" he said, almost angrily.

"What are you saying?" she whispered, hoarsely, still staring at him.

"Well, if you will have the plain truth, you're not my wife at all! Now, do you understand?"

"It's a lie!" she gasped, "a cruel lie. You want to be free of me—you are trying to deceive me! You—you had our marriage certificate—you have it now!"

"Waste paper, my dear. The man that performed that ceremony, in obedience to your scruples, was not a priest at all, simply a friend of mine."

"It's a lie!" she repeated, in a raised, harsh voice. "You have shown me since that wretched day what a dastard you are; but not dastard enough for that. Oh, Edgar! you loved me once—I loved you. By that love, by its faintest memory, tell me you are lying to me! I will go away, I will starve, I will die! but never urge my claim, I swear to you, only tell me the truth."

"Clair!" said he, with a laugh. "I tell you you've none. What do you think I should care to deceive you for? I've nothing to do but to go away, and were you fifty times my wife you couldn't do anything. Hundreds of men have done that before now. But I repeat, the man was no priest—"

She reeled, caught blindly at the table, clinging to it with both hands, while she faced him, and even he shrank from the look in her eyes.

"If I had a weapon," she said, "I would kill you! There can't be a God, or He would never have let you do your devil's work."

He started back, coward to the soul, at her rapid movement, as if he feared her.

But she only caught up her bonnet lying on the table, and sprang past him to the door.

Her eyes, through all their wild glitter, had never lost that fixed, dazed stare.

Her lips were drawn like one who strangles with deadly bodily torture.

She wrenched back the handle of the door in frenzied haste, and, without looking back, without even hearing his half-frightened "Violet!" was out in the passage, and then the street.

She was mad as she hurried out into the broad thoroughfare, full of spring sunshine, and crowded with people going to their daily work, from honest homes; mad as she ran over the road and down the Embankment, and leaning on the balustrade, looked at the glistening water, and they seemed to her so happy and cool and pure.

Pure! ay, poor stained soul and broken heart! There was no memory under those deep waters, no last innessence to think of—no blasted honour to regret. And so, fearless, not able to bear her heavy burden, she had crept down the slippery steps.

And now she sat in a prison chamber, and at her side the chaplain. He did not preach to her; he did not try at once to make her see the sin of her act; he tried to win her confidence, to get a little more than "yes," and

"no," from those tense lips that just opened and closed again.

He saw at once she was different from the usual type under his charge. He could distinguish gentle birth and culture through all disguises; and whatever the misery that had made her attempt her life, felt sure she might have been sinned against, but was not sinning. The extremity of her anguish almost proved that. He let her alone for a while, and came again the next day.

Violet, who had been respectful the first day, but seemingly insensible, now showed faint signs of pleasure at his entrance.

He had anticipated, from her previous demeanour, a difficulty in getting her to promise to make no further attempts at self-destruction, but to his surprise she said at once in answer to his question—"Yes, I will promise that," speaking gently, with that dreamy look in her eyes that shows retrospection. He said smiling—

"I think I have needlessly asked that promise; you had already made the resolution to yourself."

"Yes," she answered in the same way. "I made it yesterday."

She could not be prevailed on to give her real name, nor anything of her story. She would be called Herbert. She was still under the belief that Edgar Marsten in repudiating her had spoken the truth. His reasoning seemed to her conclusive. Why should he take the trouble to lie when his purpose could be served without it? and she knew him too well to be doubtful of his capacity for such crime.

She had no means at present of verifying what he had said. She never had known the name of the man who had performed the marriage ceremony.

So she could not be prevailed on to reveal her position; she would only say that her husband had turned her out of his house, and refused any idea of reconciliation; she acknowledged she was well born and bred, and accepted gratefully the kindly offer of help. In a month's time, the chaplain said, he should be sailing for India to join a university mission, but meanwhile he had hopes of placing her in a happier position. And he kept his word.

### CHAPTER III.

On a certain afternoon in the end of May three or four artists were gathered in a studio in Kensington. This studio was not in that aesthetic road which would be pretty if there was a stump even of a tree to be seen, but it was in a house that stood back from the road, and had Virginia creepers half up the front and flowers in the balconies.

The owner of the studio appeared to be the man who leaned against the mantelpiece, while the others inspected pictures and sketches. He looked about thirty, but might be a little over—a brown haired man, whose silky moustache had a slightly golden tinge, and whose clear rich complexion was plainly tanned.

His attitude was full of ease, but not indolent. The man, even as he leaned in such repose, seemed instinct with life and vigor; the glance of the dark brown eyes, for all the softness given by their very hue and the shade of the sweeping lashes, was bright and keen, the whole face full of a constant play of expression.

"I suppose you've done your inspection of my diggings?" said he presently. "Come and have some cigars before you go, and tell me what's been doing. I've promised to dine with my sister at seven."

"Mrs. Challoner?" said one of the men. "She's living in Hamilton-terrace, isn't she?"

"Yes."

They began their chat by praising and criticising the new studio, not yet got into order, since the artist had only just arrived from a prolonged residence in Italy. Then of course they talked of their friends, births,

marriages, deaths, and the usual changes that always occur when one is away.

"By the bye," said young Ayre, "do you remember that small house in Vale street, near Montagu-square, that you used to say you'd like to have, Eriscourt?"

"So I should, if there had been a good room for a studio; but there wasn't. What of it?"

"It was taken about two years ago by Mrs. Herbert."

"Who the deuce is she?" asked Eriscourt.

"The prettiest creature, and the pleasantest 'At Homes.' Quite an acquisition to our Bohemian circle."

"Who is she?" asked the artist at once. "Do all you fellows know her? Yes? Who goes to her 'At Homes'?"

"Lots of people."

"How vague—a little Bohemian herself, eh?"

"Why, yes," said Ayre; "but there's no harm in her. Nobody knows exactly who she is. She had no credentials; made her own way; but she is a perfect lady. Our womankind visit her, of course; perhaps such people might not."

"She might be a runaway wife!" said Eriscourt, laughing. "I imagine that she must be young; as to the prettiness I shall judge for myself."

"You always do. I never knew a more unbelieveable beggar about feminine looks than you are," said Ayre, in a rather aggrieved tone. "However, she has the undeniable advantage of youth. I suppose she is older, but, by Jove! she does not look more than twenty."

"Is she separated from her husband, or a widow?" asked Eriscourt.

"She says she's a widow."

"Where does her money come from?"

"Oh," said Harrington, hitherto rather a listener than a talker, "that's one of the things nobody knows; presumably left her by her husband. However, it's really nothing to us what were her antecedents. She takes her own stand but there is nothing blamable in anything she does. You must be introduced, Eriscourt; she is always pleased to see new people."

"Ah," said the painter, "then probably she is also glad to get rid of them when the newness is off."

"Not at all. She is fond of seeing fresh faces; but I never noticed that the old ones were less welcome. Don't pretend to be mere cynical than you are, and about a pretty woman, too."

"How do I know she is pretty? and what man of the world would take, on her own showing, a young woman whom proper people won't notice, and who won't give an account of herself?" said the incomparable Eriscourt, successfully resisting Ayre's attempts to stifle his speech with a forbidding hand. "I'll be introduced, of course, if none of you will tell my sister."

They all laughed. The idea of independent, cosmopolitan Leigh Eriscourt being afraid of his highly proper sister was too funny.

"My dear Leigh," said Harrington, "we are a brotherhood in art and in all other things. We won't tell Mrs. Challoner anything—not even if you go to the new club that has been a good deal the fashion amongst a certain set this last year."

"What club—where? Somebody told me the other day there was a new club somewhere near Regent street. Is it proprietary? I abhor proprietary clubs."

"It is proprietary," said Harrington, "and not your sort nor mine. Prince's it is called, because the proprietor is George Prince. There's a good deal of play goes on, I fancy, though I've only been in occasionally; rather second-rate people, too."

"Cads!" said Eriscourt, decisively.

"Oh, dear, no; don't be so downright, my son. I said second-rate people, by which I referred not entirely to their birth or breeding. They are certainly a fast lot, both English and foreign."

"A gambling club," said Erlscourt, "with perhaps a little more than gambling."

"I don't know. It gives one the impression it might be, yet I've never seen anything there beyond very high play."

"It's sometimes night and day play," said Ayre.

"Betting sub rosa, I dare swear," said Erlscourt, in the same oracular way in which he had spoken before; "which means that sooner or later they will come under the gnomes in blue."

"Prince isn't at all the sort of man to be outwitted," said Lane, who had been looking at a portfolio of sketches while the talk went on, "to judge by his looks."

"That doesn't go for much," said Harrington. "Men carrying on anything contraband nearly always, in process of time, overstep the mark; they neglect precautions, they grow too confident."

"Then, *hey presto!*" put in Erlscourt, with his quick, vivacious manner, and slight gesture, without which he seldom spoke, "down come the myrmidons of outraged law, and the place that has known Prince's knows it no more."

"There's a tap at the door," exclaimed Ayre; "shall I order admittance, Erlscourt?"

A nod from the master of the house produced from Ayre a shout of "Come in!" and the door opening admitted—not the expected servant, but a lady inclining to middle-age, handsomely but soberly dressed, who, nevertheless, appeared to produce the effect of a bombshell on the assembled Bohemians, all except Erlscourt, who sprang forwards with outstretched hands, and a light in his hand some face.

"My dear old Mentor!" he said, throwing both arms round the new comer, and kissing her impulsively.

There was no doubt about his fondness for the step-sister, who had been something of a mother to him in his boyhood, notwithstanding a comical look of dismay he gave his friends as he led his sister to a seat, and presented her to those she did not know.

"My dear boy," said she, resettling the charming bonnet Erlscourt's impetuous embrace had disturbed in its centre of gravity, "I hope I am not disturbing you and your friends—"

"Not at all, Mrs. Challoner," exclaimed Harrington. "We are delighted to see you; but I daresay you and Erlscourt would like a quiet chat on your first meeting."

"Ayre, open that window," said Erlscourt, passing his hand suspiciously over his lips as Mrs. Challoner gazed round the disorderly room; "the place smells awfully of smoke. No, my sister wouldn't turn you out for the world. Stay where you are, there's good fellows."

"I shall be very sorry for any of you to think of going," said Emily Challoner, with good-humoured authority.

It was a serious test of her kindness and good breeding, for though she adored her artist brother she did not adore his helter-skelter artist friends, albeit they were not one wit worse than he was.

"I was down at the Town Hall at bazaar, and as I thought I would just come on here and surprise Leigh."

"Very jolly of you, indeed, Emmie. I am only sorry my new quarters are hardly fit for your reception," said Erlscourt. "I won't ask you how you like them."

"Well, dear," said she, looking round again, "it does seem rather untidy; but I suppose it's not been put to rights yet. And you always were an untidy being. I don't see, now, why you need have that cloth on the floor."

"Harrington," said Erlscourt, severely, as he passed that gentleman on his way to pick up the offending cloth, "that's your doing. You swept this off to make room for those cartoons."

"So sorry!" murmured Harrington.

"Well, then, help me to tidy up."

A whisk here, a pull there from willing but

unskillful hands was what they called "tidying."

It produced an effect of some sort, which they fondly imagined was the right one, but their hopes were crushed when Mrs. Challoner said, with a resigned air,—

"I must take the will for the deed. You make confusion worse confounded. Young men never can put a thing straight. It's very kind of you though, to take pity on my distress at disorder."

"I'll console you with some tea, Emmie" said Erlscourt. "If you've been doing a bazaar you must want something. Shall I order it here or in the drawing-room? I must say we've left the room not much better than we found it; but the smoke's all gone out. I think the drawing-room is tidy."

"Oh, is it? I looked in when I had sent the girl downstairs, and the men had been doing something to the gas, I suppose, for the tables and chairs were all huddled together."

"Oh, Gemini! so they have," said Erlscourt—"the men, I mean." And with a lift of the brows that nearly upset the others' gravity he rang for the tea.

The litter on a small table was hastily swept off when the housemaid brought in the tea equipage, and Erlscourt begged his sister to play hostess.

"We don't often have the treat of a lady doing the honours," he said. "We get tea anyhow, in out-and-out bachelor fashion."

"And I guess what that is," responded Mrs. Challoner, dispensing the fragrant beverage smilingly, and in spite of untidiness and a strong flavour of bachelordom, rather enjoying the thing.

It was very different, this afternoon tea in a studio, with the guests in careless artistic costume, to her correct meal in her precise drawing room.

Yet there was a charm in the young men's idle, merry talk, their quips at one another, their high spirits and happy-go-lucky ways, and she was so delighted to see her boy again after his long absence, to find him so well and handsome, that she could have forgiven greater sins this afternoon than he and his friends committed.

It was an experience unique to her—one she would not have sought, but which formed a pleasant recollection afterwards, perhaps partly because so out of her range.

She heard a lot of artist talk and artist jargon she hardly understood, and which she would not let them stop when they strayed into it unawares.

Yet—strange contradiction!—she was glad to get back to her own quiet, faultless house, where the servants moved like machines, and were never tempted to smile inopportunistly, and no nonsense was talked, and the wave of the outer world that came in was that of conventional life.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"You'll let me call for you to-morrow, Erlscourt, won't you?" said Ayre, after Mrs. Challoner had been put into her carriage; "it's Mrs. Herbert's day, and I should like to introduce you."

"Yes, I'll come," answered Erlscourt, "though I think 'At Homes' are apt to be something dull. If you'll come to lunch at half-past one I'll promise you a feed of some sort, but mind, be punctual."

"Erlscourt knows my weakness," said Ayre, highly amused. "I must be sharp to 1.30, else I shall find our abstemious painter has completed his frugal repast, and the tables are cleared away. I very often wonder what you live on."

"Art, of course," said Lane, melodramatically. "I say, Leigh, I hope your sister wasn't shocked."

"Not at all; do her good if she were," answered Erlscourt. "She wants rousing up. I tell her they all go to sleep in that irreproachable Hamilton-terrace. But she enjoys non-

sense; don't be visited with scruples of doubt. I can tell you when I go to her place I turn it topsy-turvy."

"I dare swear you do; but then it's easy to see she spoils you," said Harrington; and Ayre remarked he should doubt if even Leigh could turn such a precise household upside down.

Leigh laughed, and acknowledged he had used the words in a relative sense.

Then the demure housemaid came in to clear away the tea-things, and the men began to think of going.

"Well, Erlscourt," they one and all said as hands were warmly shaken, "good luck and success to you in your new domicile."

"Thanks," said the painter, with a smile in his large brown eyes. "I ought to be happy and successful here if good wishes would make me so."

And then he lingered at the gate, and came back slowly up the little garden path, glancing up at the old-fashioned house with its trailing flowers and creepers.

"Yes," he said to himself, "I've often thought in a new place what will happen to me, what changes will come to me, and, thank Heaven, hitherto there has only been increasing prosperity. I wonder what this old house will see."

By the time Ayre came the next day the place had been got into order, and the dining-room presented an appearance that augured better for the promised "feed" than Erlscourt's speech. Preparation and service were alike good, and if the host was a sparing and unappreciative eater, the guest made up for his deficiencies. Then cigars were a necessity.

"And as the afternoon has to be wasted," said Erlscourt, "we may as well do it thoroughly. Bring your chair into the balcony."

It was past three when they entered the gardens and struck across for the park, intending to walk to Vale-street. Afterwards Erlscourt remembered that he had gone that afternoon in something of the martyr spirit, that he would rather have lingered under the beautiful old trees and watched the quivering light and shade. Would it have been better if he had?

"These horrid, dusty, arid streets!" he said, with a gesture of disgust, as they left the park.

Ayre laughed at him.

"You forgot the streets," said he, "when you get into Mrs. Herbert's drawing room."

"Crammed with a hundred people, I dare swear."

"No, with less than the number they will hold. Remember her circle is not large—as yet."

They stopped before the door of a somewhat small house, that had an aspect of brightness, in strong contrast to the prevailing dulness of its street companions. Whether it was the plate glass of the windows, the lace curtains within, or the flowers in the balconies it were hard to say—perhaps all three had some share in the effect.

Within it was the same—a small square hall led on one side to the dining-room, and in front of you, as you entered, the staircase went up to the rooms above. This arrangement gave, as it usually does, an impression of greater space than there really was.

Ayre went into the house with the familiar air of an *habitué*; the pretty maid-servant greeted him with a smile, respectfully suppressed, and was about to precede the new guests upstairs when Ayre stopped her.

"Some one is singing," said he, "we'll go in quietly, without announcement. Mrs. Herbert would never forgive me if I created a buzz while music was going on."

"She is musical, then?" asked Erlscourt, carelessly. He was not particularly interested in Mrs. Herbert,

"Yes, a cultivated musician. She does not play much, though—told me once her piano had been neglected, I believe, though, she

is taking lessons. Here we are; just let us stand inside the door, Erlscourt, and no one will notice us."

They entered by the back drawing-room leading into the front one *en suite*. No one was there; every one had collected in the larger apartment.

Erlscourt smiled a little to himself as his artist eye rested on the pretty picture before him—a picture set in a frame of amber, and lace curtains, that took the place of folding doors.

It was all very simple and so harmonious that one could scarcely tell how the effect was produced. Beyond the forepart of the picture the eye travelled to a vista of green and the deep brilliance of scarlet geraniums, completely hiding the bare ugly railings of the balconies.

Some one was singing—and very well, too—one of Molloy's quaint ballads. The song came to an end just as Erlscourt became conscious of a faint curiosity to see the owner of this charming room; there was the usual buzz of tongues relieved from their enforced silence, and Ayre touched his companion.

"Come along," he said, "here's Mrs. Herbert."

Erlscourt saw standing near a table a rather tall woman, with a very slight girlish figure—that young thing already a widow! But when she turned and he saw her face he saw also his mistake—it was older than her figure—he would have given her four or five-and-twenty.

"Mr. Ayre," said she, smiling, and holding out a small pretty hand, "I am very glad to see you. You have been here long?"

Then her eyes went to the stranger with a sudden dilation. Lifting her hand to arrange the flower in her bosom no one noticed how tightly it was pressed against the fragile blossoms.

"I have availed myself of your *carte blanche*," said Ayre. "You know Leigh Erlscourt by name."

"And now by sight," said she, smiling again and looking straight into the artist's face as he bent over the hand she offered. "Mr. Ayre knows all friends of his are welcome."

Her lips, rather pale, pressed themselves together as she finished speaking. She seemed to draw a breath of relief.

"You do me too much honour," said Erlscourt. "I assure you, Mrs. Herbert, I was not prepared for so kind a welcome from Ayre's description of you."

"What do you mean?" demanded Ayre, tragically, and Mrs. Herbert laughed.

"What has he been saying against me?" she asked, catching the fun in the new guest's face. It seemed reflected in her own.

"Threatened me with all manner of penalties if I ventured beyond the door while there was singing going on. But you are standing, Mrs. Herbert, let me fetch you a chair."

He brought forward a low chair near, a courtesy which she accepted with a little gracious movement of the head, and sat down.

"You see," she said, "some people are Vandals in music, and I am obliged to make a strict rule for all, then no one will be offended—except Mr. Ayre, who is a Vandal."

"I have a wholesome terror of your displeasure," said that gentleman. "I insured it once."

"And the once was, of course, enough," said Erlscourt. "I am not a Vandal, Mrs. Herbert, so I shall not run the risk of offending you."

"No," said Ayre, "you are music mad." Then with an apology to the hostess he left them, saying he saw some friends across the room.

"If you are 'music mad,'" said Violet Herbert, "I suppose you play or sing?"

"I play—the piano a little, not enough for company; I gave my study to the violin, and I have kept that up. I also sing."

(To be continued.)

## THE CURSE OF THE LESTERS.

—:o:—

### CHAPTER XXI.

The crisis was over, and Vans Tempest lived.

Christmas, the new year, and quite half of January had fled while she lay with the fever sapping her young life, tended with kindly care by those who knew nothing of her name and history, save the fragments they could piece together from her delirious talk, and the two facts she had told Lady Redmond before her illness began—that she was an orphan, and her mother had died in France.

Lord Redmond, good, easy man, left most things domestic to his wife and the Countess, though no child of her own had ever nestled in her arms, possessed the true mother's heart.

Having once taken the stranger into her house, she insisted she should have all the care and attention her illness needed, and that until she was quite convalescent there should be no questions asked of her.

"Why should we force sad thoughts upon her when she is only just struggling back from the gates of death?" asked Lady Redmond, gravely, when Sir Lovel tried to impress upon her the fact that she might be cherishing some base adventuress and that for Nora's sake and her own she ought to discover as soon as possible the antecedents of the poor little stranger. "This house is large enough for her to stay here till she is quite strong without coming in your way, if you are afraid she may contaminate you."

Sir Lovel smiled. He really could not help it.

"Aunty," he called her so sometimes, partly because he liked the relationship of nephew better than the remoter one of cousinship, and partly because he had caught the habit from Nora, "Aunty, I believe you think me heartless."

"No I don't," said Lady Redmond, slowly; "but I always feel sorry for girls. I think they come off very badly in life's battle."

Sir Lovel smiled.

"And I think they are the happiest creatures in the world. Just look at Nora. Did you ever see any one enjoy life so thoroughly?"

"She won't enjoy it any the less because I refuse to be as Pharaonic as you wish, Lovel. I know you are dying to make me inquire that poor child's history. You would like me to preach her a long lecture, and then hand her over to the police or a reformatory if there was the slightest discrepancy in her narrative; but I can't do it. Perhaps you haven't looked at her?"

"I saw her once—a veritable mass of snow."

"Then you couldn't notice how pretty she is, and how young. But it wasn't that, Lovel, that warmed my heart to her. She is the image of a friend I lost long years ago."

Lovel smiled.

"I thought there must be some reason for the extraordinary interest you took in her. You are a great deal more romantic than any one I ever met, but I don't think even you would have made such a fuss over a mere street beggar unless she had some associations for you."

"You can hardly call her a beggar," said my lady, coldly, "for she has never begged since she came here. I should like to tell you the story, Lovel. My husband is too practical to be interested in it, and I should not like to sadden Nora by such a grave narrative; but perhaps you would only laugh."

There were tears standing in her eyes.

"I could never laugh at anything that troubled you," said the young man, simply. "I fear I am rather hard-hearted. You see, since my mother died there has been no softening influence in my life, but I can truly say I never laughed at any real trouble; and if you like to tell me this story, please do, it may soften my impressions of your patient."

At present I feel very much as though you were being 'taken in,' and that I were in a measure guilty, since it was I who discovered that strange bundle lying in the snow."

"My father married twice," said Lady Redmond. "I was the youngest of the first family, and there were half-a-dozen years between me and my stepmother's eldest child. My sisters had married and left home. Lady Tremaine was much engaged in society. I was a plain, sickly girl of seventeen, out of the schoolroom, and yet too delicate and backward to enter the gay world."

"My life was a lonely, dreary one. My stepmother was not unkind, but she was forced to live in a whirl of gaiety to keep up her husband's political interests—or she thought so. I was left very much alone; and so, when it was time to engage a governess for her own children, out of care for my happiness, she chose some one young enough to be a real companion to me."

Lady Redmond paused. Her voice had a kind of choked sob in it, and it was a few moments before she could go on.

"I know people scoff at girlish friendships, but my love for Dorothy Tempest was the strongest feeling of my heart until I met Lord Redmond years later."

"She was the first real friend I ever had. She was young, beautiful, and accomplished; I was plain, sickly, and backward even for my age. In years there was little difference between us; in all else we were the greatest contrasts, but we loved each other dearly. She seemed to see what little talents I had, and tried to draw them out."

"I am not a clever woman, Lovel, nor a fascinating one, but whatever good or attractive there may be about me, I owe it all to Dorothy."

Lovel, who knew Lady Redmond as the kindest woman of his acquaintance, a gracious, pleasant hostess, who made her house seem home to all her friends, who was the greatest joy and treasure of her husband's life, the idol of his tenantry and servants, was deeply moved.

"Don't go on, aunty," he said, simply. "You have said quite enough. I am sure if that poor girl upstairs reminds you in any way of your old friend, you are right to help her."

"I would rather go on," persisted the Countess, "for I am in a dilemma, and I think you can help me. Dorothy was beautiful. She played and sang like an *artiste*. Money was not plentiful in my father's house. Lady Tremaine could not afford to engage professional musicians to make the parties attractive, and so it came about that Dorothy used to go downstairs whenever there was company. Her music made her welcome, and my stepmother, having neither grown-up daughters or young sisters to be jealous for, never resented Dorothy's beauty winning attention."

"She had much to suffer later on, but I like to think in our house she had neither slights nor unkindness to remember. We were all fond of her."

"Lady Tremaine regarded her as a phenomenon, something she herself had discovered. My father peeted her with an old man's admiration for a pretty face."

"I believe myself she was happier far with us than in her own home; her brother was a clergyman, and his wife, a useful bustling sort of woman, with narrow Calvinistic notions, had nothing in sympathy with Dorothy. Now, in our house she was treated more as a pet *protégé* than a dependent."

"Well, I must not weary you, Lovel; before she had been with us a year Dorothy gave notice to leave. She assigned no reason. My step-mother was annoyed with her reticence, and would ask no questions. A month after she had gone came a letter for her from her brother. Lady Tremaine sent it back saying briefly she had left. Then Mr. Tempest called—*I* did not see him, but I heard all about the interview later—he and Lady Tremaine put

their heads together, and they agreed that Dorothy had died with a lover."

"I begin to understand," said Sir Lovel, slowly. "You think the girl upstairs is her child?"

"I cannot tell. Lady Tremaine ransacked her brain to guess who it was, but there had been so many charmed by Dorothy's beauty and talents that it was difficult. She never spoke to me or I could have told her the man who was oftenest at Dorothy's side. I had no proof—none, only for two years after she left us he never entered our house, and when he came back, although fortune had smiled on him in the interval, and given him what he never dreamed of, he looked like one with a heavy trouble, a shadow on his face."

"Times had changed for me too in those two years. I was the Honourable Miss Tremaine then, and went with my step-mother to all her gayeties. I could not, I thought, remind him much of the sickly pallid girl he had seen so often at Dorothy's side, but I had not forgotten my friend. I seemed to feel that he knew her fate, and so one night when he had taken me into dinner, when he was utterly unprepared, I turned on him suddenly with the question, 'Do you remember Miss Tempest?' You used to see a good deal of her when you were here so often two years ago."

"I am sure a denial was on his lips, but perhaps he saw it would be useless; at any rate, he did not speak it. He answered me very gravely, and in a low tone, 'I shall never forget her while I live,' and when I went on to ask if he knew where she was, he told me sadly he would give his fortune to find her. I am quite sure he loved her; either something came between them or he got tired."

Lovel understood quite well the doubt the Countess left unspoken. He knew she believed the waif he had found in the snow was the daughter of her old friend, but he was sure from her manner that she feared Dorothy had been deceived, and that their unknown invalid was in the eyes of the law "nobody's dangle-ter."

Nurse Western interrupted their tête-à-tête with an unusually grave look upon her cheerful face.

"If you would please come upstairs, my lady, she would like to see you. She is quite herself now, and she wants to thank you and then go away, I'm thinking," and here the nurse dried her eyes suspiciously. "There as showed her no kindness have a right to answer for poor lamb."

Lady Redmond followed nurse without a word of protest.

Vana sat in a low chair by the fire; she was dressed in a pale blue wrapper which belonged to Nore, but there was nothing in the dainty garment out of keeping with the beauty and refinement of the girl's face.

Vana had always been fair to see, but there was something so ethereal and unearthly in her loveliness now that Lady Redmond felt a strange pang as she took the little snowflake of a hand, and hoped she felt better.

"Nurse has told me everything," said Vana, as Mrs. Western went out and closed the door, leaving the invalid and the Countess tête-à-tête. "Indeed I never meant to trespass on you like this. I had lost my way. I remember walking up to the house hoping to find a servant who would direct me, and then all seems blank."

"My dear," said Lady Redmond, gently, "you are very welcome to anything we have been able to do for you; but I fear there are no hearts abiding for you somewhere. Won't you let me write and try to make your peace with your relations? You are so young and fragile to stand alone in the world."

Vana shook her head gently.

"I am better now. I shall be able to earn my own living soon, and, oh! Lady Redmond, the bread of charity is so bitter I cannot eat it any more!"

"You told me the first night I saw you, dear, that your mother had died in France. Do you know that you remind me very vividly

of a friend of my own I lost more than twenty years ago? When I look at you it seems to me my dear Dorothy has come back. Would you tell me your mother's name? The resemblance is so wonderful I think sometimes you must be my dead friend's child?"

Vana shook her head.

"I am sure my mother had no grand friends, my lady," she said, decidedly. "She was a governess when my father married her, and I think she must have been of very humble birth, for my father's family never noticed her. When she was dying she wrote to my uncle, my father's brother. He came the day after she died and took me to his home, but he made me promise never to mention my mother to his children. He was poor himself, only a country clergyman, and yet he seemed to look down upon my mother."

"You have not told me her name yet."

"Because I have never heard her maiden name. She was Mrs. Tempest and my uncle is the Rev. James Tempest, Vicar of Vale Lester, in Norfolk; but no one ever told me my mother's name before her marriage."

Lady Redmond understood and felt a throb of genuine respect for the Vicar and his wife. They might have been harsh, but they had spared the child the bitter truth. They had allowed her to think her father their loved and lamented brother, and that they had neglected and oppressed his widow rather than that she should suspect that mother was their erring sister, and her father unknown.

"You must be her child," and Lady Redmond pressed a motherly kiss on the pale cheek. "Dear I loved Dorothy Tempest as a sister; you must trust me for her sake."

"Then you can help me?" said Vana, hopefully. "You will tell me my mother's maiden name, and help me to find out her relations? They won't be ashamed of her, like the Tempests; because she was poor they won't think my likeness to her a disgrace."

A lump came into Lady Redmond's throat. "Dear child, I cannot. When I knew your mother she was Dorothy Tempest. I never heard of her by any other name."

Vana sighed.

"I hoped you knew her family. It is very strange no one seems to remember her before she was married. Mr. Lester told me just as you did, that he was an old friend of hers; but when I asked her name, he said he never knew her before she was Dorothy Tempest."

"Percy Lester!" asked Lady Redmond, with a sudden look of surprise, "do you know him?"

"I met him once, and he was very kind. He told me I must always come to him if I wanted a friend; but he lives close to my uncle at Vale Lester."

Lady Redmond sat down close to Vana.

"Tell me everything," she said, simply. "I owe your mother what nothing can repay; she changed me from a dull, discontented girl, to a bright, hopeful woman. I shall think it a pleasure to do aught for her child."

"And you won't betray me?"

"Your confidence shall be sacred. I won't even share it with my husband or Nore."

So Vana told her story, keeping back but one part: that which concerned her first love. She told Lady Redmond how from the very first she had been unwelcome at Vale Lester Vicarage, and how when David Davenish asked her to be his wife she accepted him just because she was so lonely and so sad.

"I never loved him," she confessed, "but he was so good, I seemed to feel I should be safe if I belonged to him, and I never deceived him. I told him the truth, and he forgave me and blessed me with his dying breath."

"And when did he die?"

"The day I came here. He was gone. There was no one to mind. I knew Aunt Hepzibah would hate keeping me more than ever, after hoping to see me off her hands, and so, while she was talking to the doctor, I slipped away. I was afraid to go to York or London, lest I should be traced. I had a little money and two rings, it seemed to me it was

enough to keep me for a little while, until they had given up looking for me, and then I thought could go to France to Pont aux Dames."

"Where your mother died?"

"Yes. Every one loved her there, and the sisters were kind to us though they called us heretics. I think, Lady Redmond, I should like to live there near my mother's grave."

"But, my dear child, that is a melancholy idea. I can understand your not liking to go back to your aunt; but—"

"I could not go back—it would kill me."

"Have you no other friends? Had Mr. Davenish no relations? You say he was a rich man. Did he make no provision for you, or was his death too sudden?"

"I don't know. He was very rich, but I did not love him. I had no right to his money."

The Countess said no more then, but the name of Davenish had a familiar sound to her, and after she had left Vana she began to wonder where she had heard it. Then she recollects the advertisement in the agony column.

"If V. T. will communicate with Graham & Graham, solicitors to the late David Davenish, she will hear of something greatly to her advantage."

It seemed to the Countess that such people as Vana's uncle and aunt would not employ a lawyer to trace their niece. Her idea was that the advertisement came from relations of the late Mr. Davenish, eager to befriend his betrothed for his sake. She had not the least intention of betraying her poor little protégé, but she felt for Vana's own sake the master was worth inquiring into.

It was barely two hours' journey from Malton to Whitby. The solicitor's full address was given in the advertisement, and her whole business in the lovely Yorkshire watering place need not take an hour. If she set out at eleven she would be home before dark. There was no occasion to explain her business. The Earl would fancy she had gone to York shopping, and though naturally the most straightforward of women, she would in this case let him remain mistaken.

Mr. Graham junior was again in command of the office, and he was certainly a little surprised when Lady Redmond's card was brought to him, and still more so when he began the interview by a desire that whatever she said should be considered sacred.

"I assure you, Lady Redmond, some of the strangest stories have been related in this office, and the old walls have never betrayed their secrets."

And then she told him everything.

"I am perfectly willing to keep Vana Tempest, and provide her with a home for her mother's sake, but I know while she is a minor I am powerless really to shield her from her aunt; and, besides, the child is proud, and would shrink from dependence, however pleasant, and so I have come to ask the meaning of your advertisement."

John Graham wronged her hand.

"I beg your pardon," he said, simply, "but I was David Davenish's friend. I promised him to befriend Miss Tempest, and her having slipped through our fingers, so to say, troubled me. I have been truly anxious about her fate."

"Remember, you have promised not to tell her uncle and aunt."

"Between ourselves, Lady Redmond, I have no wish to. Lawyers are supposed to have no feelings, but Mrs. Tempest fairly disgusted me. I wished she had been a man that I could have spoken my mind to her."

"Perhaps she was not displeased to lose Vana?"

"She was intensely annoyed when she discovered she was an heiress. Before that I think she would have felt rather grateful to any one who had brought her proof of the poor child's death."

"And my poor little friend is really an heiress?"

"Poor Davenish left her all he had. There's

a fine old place near here, a small house in town, five thousand a year, and a large amount of savings. We have the honour to be Miss Tempest's trustees. Mr. and Mrs. Clifford were named her personal guardians, but the lady died quite suddenly within a month of Mr. Devenish. Her husband started for America yesterday, and I don't know when he will be back. If you are willing to take charge of our ward, Lady Redmond, I need not tell you it would be a great boon to us."

"And I would do so willingly," said the Countess, "only there are difficulties in the way."

"You mean her arriving at your house as she did?"

"Not entirely. My maid, who helped me with her at first, has left to be married. The nurse who has been with her throughout the illness I can trust thoroughly, and Dr. Field, I know, would keep the secret, but my husband might object."

"That, of course, is unanswerable. It, however, Lord Redmond consented we could give you proofs of our ward's respectability. Her uncle is a country clergyman. The Clifffords, who introduced her to poor Devenish, were landed gentry, and while at Vale Lester I know she was received in the family of the late Sir George Lester as companion and governess to his children. Except that strange flight from the White House to Malton, there is nothing in Miss Tempest's life the strictest mind could cavil at."

Lady Redmond went home and told her lord. Not then—not indeed until she had dispatched Vana under charge of Nurse Western to Hastings.

It was just as she had told John Graham, the maid had left the country. No other servant at Redmond House had seen the little wail face to face. Dr. Field might be relied on. Nurse Western was discretion itself. If the Earl and Countess chose to introduce Miss Tempest as a young friend who was spending some months with them no one would recognise her as the fugitive they had found in the snow.

"There is Lovel to think of," said Lord Redmond, gravely. "He is here a good deal, and he might take a fancy to her."

"I thought you looked on him as Nora's fiance!"

"He has never proposed to her. I should not like Lovel to marry your protégé."

"He would not do that. I should tell him the truth before she came, and, Cyril, don't misunderstand me, I never dreamed of introducing Vana into society. I only want to keep her with us until she is of age, just to screen her from her relatives."

"Remember," said Lord Redmond, thoughtfully, "there must be no concealments, no false names. She must be known as Miss Tempest, and if any one asks questions, she is the ward of some country lawyer's who asked you to take care of her because she had no near relations."

"And you will be good to her?"

"I don't think I shall like her," he said, slowly, "but I will promise to give the matter a fair trial. What really signifies is how Nora takes it."

But Nora was delighted. She thought the romantic story (nothing was kept back from her), more interesting than any novel, and almost quarrelled with Lovel Delamere when he declared, (the opinion was expressed in a tête-à-tête), it was the greatest piece of folly he ever heard of.

"Mark my words," said the young Baronet, "you'll all regret it. The girl will disagree you at every turn, and end by sloping (as she's fond of running away), with the butler."

"Lovel, you are unbearable."

"I've only a little common sense, which none of you romantic people seem to understand. Don't tell me Miss Tempest has no relations she can live with. People ought not to quarrel with their belongings. I've no patience with family estrangements."

Nora pouted.

"You saved her life, so I suppose you think you've right to abuse her; but we mean to have her for six months, then if it doesn't answer, aunty will find her another home. By the way, Sir Lovel, if you hate family estrangements why don't you seek out your aunt and cousin and commence an affectionate intimacy with them?"

"That is quite a different matter."

"It is. Well, Miss Tempest will be here to-morrow, and if you aren't nice to her aunty and I shall hate you."

## CHAPTER XXII.

BASIL LESTER was not an ardent lover his mother thought when he wrote to her; that his marriage with Fenella, would not take place in June unless his aunt was quite willing to part with her adopted child. Poor Lady Lester felt things were going very hardly with her. March had come round; she was as far as ever from finding out the mystery of her husband's death; she was suffering from anxiety, all the miseries of small economies, and she missed with painful keenness, the lavish generosity which Percy Lester had shown her in the early weeks of her widowhood.

She had cast off him and his wife at Basil's bidding in her horror at the base idea of his having aided in her husband's murder. She had put insults on her brother-in-law he would find it difficult to forget; but she missed his ready help. It was two months turned now since she had made the breach, and she had had time to experience poverty's pinch. A great gloom hung over Vale Lester. Miss Deborah and Fenella were still away. There was no one to run in and out of the Court and cheer up the poor widow and her daughter.

She was not a strong-minded woman, and she took almost a hatred for the place she had loved so well, and wrote to Basil suggesting she and his sisters should come over and keep house for him in Rosecommon. Basil's answers she deemed both selfish and unfeeling. He wrote gently, reminding her that he had already given up to her his house (the Court) and every penny of his private income. For Fenella's sake he must keep something. He could not marry and owe everything to his wife. If it was absolutely necessary, he would try and allow his mother a trifle more, but he could not advise the expense of a removal to Ireland, since in a very few months he hoped to be a married man, when his wife would naturally be his housekeeper, his mother and the girls would have to come back to their old quarters. There was nothing unreasonable to an impartial mind in this, but Lady Lester was deeply offended.

"I never liked Fenella," she said bitterly to Dr. Stone, who was the only person left in Vale Lester for her to confide in. "I am sure this is her doing."

The doctor was too kind-hearted to remind the poor lady of how infatuated she had once been with Miss Devraux. He only said gravely—

"I don't think so. Sir Basil is in Ireland, and his fiance at Arden. There would not have been time for him to consult her between your letter and his reply."

"Why do they stay at Arden?" asked Lady Lester irritably. "There's the cottage going to ruin, and the Judkins eating their heads off doing nothing. What possesses Deborah to stay so long away from home?"

"I sent her away. I considered our winter too cold for her. Besides, after that strange attack on her life, Vale Lester had painful associations for her."

"Well, what made her go to Arden, a place no one had ever heard of before?"

"I beg your pardon, Lady Lester, a great many people go to Arden now-a-days, it is quieter than Bournemouth, and the air is even milder."

Lady Lester shrugged her shoulders.

"She never used to be mean with all her faults. She must know the poor girls are longing for a little change. Why can't she ask one or two of them on a visit?"

"Perhaps she thinks to stay with an invalid aunt would not bring them much pleasure."

"Well, Dr. Stone, I don't mind telling you I wrote to her myself, and said Sybil was ailing, and a month by the sea-side would do her all the good in the world. She wrote back and asked why I didn't send the child to Hastings, as though I had money for such business! No, doctor. It's my belief Fenella does not mean any of us to get a sight of her. That girl is as artful as she's high!"

"But, my dear lady, you forget that Miss Devreux is engaged to your son. Her interests and his are identical."

The widow pouted.

"Well, she treats us very strangely. She never answers my letters under a week, however important they are, and if I've asked once when they're coming home, I have a dozen times, but she does not condescend to tell me."

"Perhaps she does not know herself. Miss Deborah struck me as a great deal broken in health before they went away. She may be so weak that Miss Fenella really cannot decide their future plans."

"Then why doesn't she send for you?"

"I am not the only doctor in the world, Lady Lester."

"But there can't be a good one at Arden."

"There are three, and one of them is an intimate friend of my own. I wrote to him as soon as you told me Miss Lester had gone to Arden, describing her case and asking his particular care for her."

"And what did he say?"

"He promised to let me know if she sent for him, but said Ivy Cottage stood a good way out of the village, and the world really he nearer a Bournemouth doctor."

"I don't like it."

Neither did Dr. Stone, but he was not going to confess as much to Lady Lester. Ever since Jane Watson's extraordinary story a most unwelcome fear had preyed upon him that poor Deborah Lester was going out of her mind.

As to Jane Watson, she was still in Mrs. Percy Lester's service, and quite satisfied with her fate. The moment Mrs. Deborah's address reached Vale Lester, Dr. Stone had sent it to Jane, and the poor woman had insisted on starting for Dorsetshire to see her late mistress, and ask why she had treated her so strangely. She reached Ivy Cottage, and was received by a very respectable young person, evidently her own successor. This girl went to her ladies with poor Jane's request, and returned promptly with an envelope.

"Miss Lester says I am to give you this; and she's sorry you had the trouble of coming."

Watson opened it on the spot, and found a handsome cheque and a few lines in the crabbed handwriting she knew so well.

"I can never see you again. I want to forget Vale Lester and its tragedy. It is no fault of yours, but I can never bear the sight of you again."

There was no mistaking the writing.

The new maid, who seemed very communicative, told Jane Miss Devreux had begged leave to speak to her and been refused. The old lady was that fitful she couldn't bear the niece out of her sight. She was well enough in health, but terribly cranky.

Jane Watson had been a servant ever since she could remember, but she had her pride.

She simply tore the cheque in pieces, and threw them into the fire. The ungracious letter she put in her pocket, and showed it to Mrs. Lester as soon as she got back to London.

Edith was sorry for her. She thought Deborah Lester, however morbid and depressed she had grown, might have seen the woman who had served her so faithfully.

"You must take your choice, Jane," she

said, kindly. "I will advertise for another situation for you, if you like, or you can stay with me?"

"I'll stay with you, please, ma'am. I've been in the family so long, I don't think I could bring myself to serve strangers."

Dr. Stone was thinking of all this while Lady Lester made her complaints, and the fear of Miss Deborah's insanity grew stronger than ever.

He had—he did not tell her sister-in-law so—offered to run down to Arden and see his late patient if she felt worse, and she had declined.

He knew two or three people who had visited Arden since Miss Lester went to it, and he had particularly inquired of them if they knew the tenants of Ivy Cottage.

On all hands he got the same answer. An invalid lady was staying there. She was in very delicate health, and never went out.

Very soon after that talk with Lady Lester he went up to London, and called on Edith and her husband.

They were living in a furnished flat at Kensington, which they had taken for six months.

Neither of them told him so, but the old man felt, from the shadow on Edith's face, that the old suspicion had followed them there.

Jane Watson, who had a private audience with the doctor, told him plainly it was so.

Not a creature had called on her mistress. Some one in the neighbourhood had asked her if Mr. Lester hadn't been tried for murder, and got off because the jury could not agree.

"It's just killing Mrs. Lester, sir," said the servant, sadly. "It makes my heart ache to see her get thinner and paler every day!"

"I am sure she never doubts her husband."

"Doubt him!" exclaimed Jane. "Bless me, sir, she'd as soon doubt herself; but, you see, she can't make other people believe her. I think she'd far rather they all spoke their thoughts out. She could speak her mind back again, then, and it would be a relief. I've thought myself, sir, it'd have been kinder if Sir Basil or one of them had just given him in charge."

It seemed a singular proof of kindness, and Dr. Stone said no.

"Well, sir," explained the woman, "if they'd just had him tried for it, he could have proved plain enough he didn't do it. Now they've all blackballed him, and he's no escape. No one has spirit enough to accuse him outright, and so he's no chance of defending himself."

The servant's words gave Dr. Stone the clue to Edith's pale, worn face, but hardly prepared him for Percy Lester's bitterness when they sat over their wine after dinner.

"If it wasn't such a cowardly thing to do, I often feel ready to put a bullet through my brain and end it," his host said to him suddenly. "Why, Dr. Stone, can't you see its killing my wife by inches. I'd change places with poor George willingly!"

"Hush!" said the old man, gravely. "Don't talk like that. I shall never forgive myself, Mr. Lester, for being led to doubt you once; but, you know, I hope not even your wife believes in you more firmly now than I do!"

"Had I not believed that, I should not have spoken so freely. Dr. Stone, what am I to do? It is four months since my brother died, and three since this awful suspicion arose, and I am no nearer living it down. All efforts to find that woman Sharpe has failed. Must I bear the burden of her sin all my life. I may have fifteen or even twenty years left me. Am I to spend them all with this stigma on me? Must I see my wife fade away before my eyes because no one will believe her husband's innocence?"

Poor Dr. Stone felt a great pity for the man, and yet it was hard to comfort him, for he felt by instinct that so long as the members of his own family held aloof from him, the world at large would never credit Percy's innocence.

"I wish your sister would come home."

"I believe even now, if I saw Deborah face to face, she would be friendly to me," said the poor scapegoat. "The last time I ever spoke to her she laughed at the bare idea of my having harmed poor George."

"Have you written to her?"

"I have done more than that," and Percy hesitated, as though he did not like the recollection. "I have been to Arden."

"To Ivy Cottage?"

"You must not tell my wife. Poor Edith! I have kept that last rebuff from her. I went down a fortnight ago."

"And Miss Lester refused to see you?"

"Worse than that. A very neat servant—her own maid, I believe—said she had gone to Bournemouth. Would I leave my name. I left it, and said I would call again the next day. I pencilled a line on the card to say I should be staying at the Arden Hotel. As I sat down to dinner, I got a note from my sister, saying she declined to receive me, and that if I persisted in remaining at Arden she should leave the place at once."

There was a long pause.

"Do you think she is going mad?" blurted out the doctor, suddenly. "Forgive the question, but I assure you it has troubled me lately."

"That's what Susan said."

"Mrs. Jepson?"

"Yes. She keeps faithful to me still, poor thing. It's odd, doctor, but poor people seem to have more faith in their fellow creatures than rich ones. Poor Susan can never touch any of Simon's wealth. She's dying, has been for weeks. Edith has done what she can for her, but we know the end may come any time."

Dr. Stone flashed a look of inquiry. Percy understood.

"No," he said, with a sigh of relief. "There can be no question of that. Her daughters nursed her from the first. It gave me a kind of terror, doctor, lest any of them should feel afraid of me, but they didn't, Heaven bless them!"

"Poor Mrs. Jepson! Her's has been a troubled life. She reaped little benefit from Simon's will."

"That will has been our curse!" said Percy, bitterly. "We must go upstairs, doctor, or Edith will be lonely. Can you give me no hope? Can you think of nothing I can do to lift this awful stigma off my name?"

The doctor hesitated.

"I don't feel it will be of any use," he said, doubtfully. "But if you like I will try. From what you tell me, poor Mrs. Jepson's days are numbered?"

"Her hours are. They said this morning she could hardly see another sun rise."

"When she is dead, poor thing, I will take the news to your sister Deborah. Death is a great softener of hearts, Mr. Lester. In the moment that she learns you and she are the last of the old stock, I think your sister must relent and consent to see you. The rest I leave to you; but I believe, with Miss Deborah asserting your innocence, this suspicion will soon die out."

"Heaven bless you!" said Percy, solemnly. "You will save my wife's life."

And the doctor was called on to redeem his promise sooner than he had expected.

That very night poor Susan Jepson passed over to the great majority.

Percy and Deborah were left alone of all the seven brothers and sisters who had listened to Simon Lester's will, and between them and young Sir Basil rested the struggle for the great inheritance.

Barely twelve hours after he had made his offer Dr. Stone was on his way to Arden, resolved to tell Deborah Lester pretty plainly that her conduct was casting a fearful slur on her brother's name, and hurrying his young wife into an untimely grave.

(To be continued.)

## THE SECRET WHICH PARTED THEM.

—:—

### CHAPTER XXII.

LEONI ANGELO slowly recovered, and had no further excuse for prolonging his stay at Llanrocken Bay Cottage; and, notwithstanding all her care and her kindness, Lady Constance in no wise suggested his remaining on, but spoke of his early renewal of his artistic work as a matter of course, and there was nothing left for him to do but to carry out her view of the case.

Before he left her, as soon as he felt able for the climb, he went to seek the sketch which he had placed in the crevice of the rock, and wondered how he had managed to put it there, suffering as he was at the time.

The painting was unharmed, and Leoni carried it home in triumph, persuaded Lady Constance to write her name upon it, and the date of that eventful day; after which he put it away with her cambric handkerchief and his mother's picture.

That she wrote "Constance Vivian," he was scarcely surprised, as she painted under that cognomen, and it was a matter of regret to him that he had not asked her to sign what he deemed her right name.

However, he did not express that regret, and so the affair went on.

He felt sorrow at the coming parting, but he was going away with one object in view, the hope to make for himself such a position in life which would enable him to ask Lady Constance to be his wife.

He wrote of this hope to his kinsman, Count Angelo, and sent a slight sketch of the beautiful face he so longed to make his own.

When the Count received the letter, he was gratified to find that Leoni had made acquaintance with the Caithness family, and such intimate acquaintance too.

He might have preferred his wedding a Roman maiden, but he was fully satisfied with his choice, and when he returned to London he found a letter awaiting him, written in kind and cordial terms saying, if Leoni would find means to prove his birth, and would bring his bride to Italy, he would receive them as his children, and beg them to remain with him so as to comfort his old age, and learn their own duties in life, and how to fill his place.

But, although he wrote to the Count of his hopes, they remained unspoken to Lady Constance herself.

The reserve in her manner towards him rather deepened than otherwise, and even though he tried more than once to gain her attention he could not do so.

Again and again he asked himself why that was, and what was to be found to account for the insidious change in her manner.

As his nurse she had been so very gentle and kind.

She was kind still, but the tenderness in her manner was gone.

Hope told him the flattering tale that it was hidden under her maidenly reserve, whereas the truth was that woman-like she could not be anything but gentle and tender to those who were sick and suffering, and dependent upon her care.

Moreover, she felt a deep debt of gratitude to Leoni for all he had done for her, and doubtless it helped on her kindness and the elusive sweetness of her manner.

Leoni fully believed himself beloved, notwithstanding her speech upon the subject, in which she coupled his name with that of Viscount Venwood as nothing beyond a friend.

He thought Lady Constance was too proud to encourage an obscure man, and one whose very parentage had not yet been satisfactorily ascertained.

Moreover, he could not blame her.

He thought the daughter of an Earl ought

to know exactly with whom, and what family, she was about to unite herself, and he felt bound in honour not to ask her to be his wife till the truth of his own history was entirely unravelled. This, he convinced himself was the shadow between them.

But in truth there was none.

The sorrow in her own heart made the shade upon the beautiful face, and the knowledge of her position caused the reserve which he felt so keenly.

Had her husband been present the old brightness of manner would have shone forth, but left as she was—alone, yet with her wife's bonds still as binding as ever, Lady Constance was more reserved than it was in her nature to be.

Leoni Angelo was well, and she felt that it would be best for him to return to town, and she told him so kindly and firmly, but with too much gentleness for him to take offence.

When the hour of parting came, it went hard with his secret.

Lady Constance was unusually sad that morning, but it was not because Leoni was going away, but because she had been reading in the paper some news of the old regiment of her husband.

But Leoni could not tell this. He knew nothing of any husband at all, and he hoped and believed that her present sorrow was for the coming loss of him.

She was standing by the window, looking out into her pretty little garden, which notwithstanding her small means was beautifully kept, her ladyship feeling that refined shrinking from untidy and unsightly things, and that love of the beautiful which is a part of a gently nurtured woman.

Suddenly Leoni stood beside her.

She tried to turn from him, but he had seen the tears in the lovely eyes, and the great love in his heart walled to his lips in words.

Lady Constance, thus caught, was too honest to make any pretence as to the reason of her sadness.

He took her hand within his own and looked longingly into her face.

"Lady Constance," he said, with utmost tenderness, "will you not let me comfort you? Believe me that there is nothing in the world I would not do to shield you from any trouble—"

She interrupted him somewhat abruptly.

"I am sure of it, you have already proved the kindness and chivalry which exists in your nature, and I am grateful to you. I am, in fact, your debtor for life, but there is nothing you can do for me now."

"I will not hide from you that I have a sorrow, but neither you nor any one else can help me."

"Most people have, I think, a cross to bear. I have one; may Heaven give me grace to carry it patiently, and not to ask to have it changed."

"See, the little carriage has come for you. Mr. Angelo, work well, and let me hear that you have made a very famous name. I shall be greatly interested in your success, and hope before long to be really proud of my friend. If ever your history is written for the good of future generations," she added with a smile, "I can add to it a thrilling page from personal experience."

"If ever that is written, dear Lady Constance," he said, "you will, I hope, contribute many pages, not only one," and he stooped and kissed the hand he held.

She gently but firmly withdrew it from him. A flushed and a faint frown passed over her features, but the innate sweetness of her disposition soon reassured itself.

"I have to thank you," he said, earnestly, for the very happiest period of my life. My mother was especially dear to me and I loved her society greatly; still of course her ideas were older than mine, and her life was a very clouded one. To my mind congenial companionship is the purest of all pleasures.

"This, dear Lady Constance, I have fully enjoyed with you. Our tastes agree, and our

thoughts too, so far as those of a man can follow in the footsteps of a woman. Of necessity his must be larger, less beautiful, coarser, like the foot itself, but they travel the same way. You have done me good, and I thank you from my heart. I shall look forward more than I can tell you to meeting you again, and I dare not say how sincerely I hope it will be soon."

"That is scarcely likely, my friend," she said, sadly. "Our paths in life lie very far apart."

"You have your fame to earn, and I my bread-and-butter. I really do not aim at more, although I am very fond of my work. Still, I know I am not a genius, and it is necessity which has caused me to brighten up the talent given me."

"Mark, my friend, mine is the *one* you have the *ten*. Use them well, and may Heaven bless you, and make you very, very prosperous and happy. I believe you deserve it. I shall always take an interest in you for a threefold reason."

"First, for your own sake, because you would, in the nobleness of your heart and manhood, have given up your life for mine. Secondly, because our mothers were very dear to one another. And, thirdly, your tastes, as you say, agree with mine, and your calling is one and the same as my own; but we must each stick to that work. We shall never prosper if we swerve from it. I came here to be very quiet, to be *alone*, in fact. Art must be my sole companion, at any rate for the present."

"It is, of course, possible that circumstances may change, which would oblige me to return to the world; but it is not probable, and I do not expect it! As it is, I must not receive visitors here, believe me. No, you must not come again, Mr. Angelo."

"I pray you not to think me unkind, for I owe you much, and I am not ungrateful nor unmindful of it. I entreat you to understand, and not to think me a churl or ingrate."

The red lips trembled!

She really liked this man, who had done so much for her, and she felt that she was hurting his feelings, and it pained her, for she was now so friendless that his companionship had in truth been a solace to her.

Still, being a true woman for her husband's sake, she would not let him come again, lest he might blame her still more, and be yet further divided from her in heart, for she had enough worldly wisdom to know that the unkind and impure in mind will find cause for censure in the most simple and innocent act.

"Do not tell me that I must not come again," he pleaded.

"I must at present," she said.

"But you spoke of a possible change," he continued, hope reviving within him, for he thought that that change might be in his own circumstances. "I must, then, wait for that time. But you will write, and let me write to you?" he asked, eagerly.

She hesitated.

"No, we will not correspond," she said, "but this I will say, that if either of us should require the other's help, we may write. If not, it is far better to keep silence, my friend. You must not think me unkind," she added, as she saw his disappointment. "Is it nothing to feel that you have a friend to depend upon should any real trouble overtake you?"

And she smiled at him.

"It is very much," he replied, softly; "and I should value the trouble which re-united me to such a friend," and he bowed before her.

"Come!" she laughed, "I do not think you can cap that, Mr. Angelo. Had we not better say, 'good-bye,' with such a kindly speech fresh in our memories? I hope very much you will be able to find out for yourself what you desire to know concerning your parentage; if not, I will communicate with the Douglas family, and ask for you the question

you wish put about a former Viscount Venwood, but I beg you to remember that I do not wish to hold any further intercourse with them for strong reasons of my own. Still, I repeat, do not ask me if you can ascertain the truth by any other means. And, Mr. Angelo, I want you to do me a favour. Will you grant my request?"

"Will I not?" he returned with a passionate tremble in his voice. "Lady Constance, have you yet to learn that I would do aught to please you, that I would lay down my life for your sake?"

"No," she answered, graciously, her sweet smile resting upon him, and making his strong heart flutter like a young girl's.

"No, you have already proved the latter, and I feel that I ought to have made your bravery known, for you would without doubt have received the Humane Society's medal; but I am, as it were, hiding from the world, and I do not wish it known where I am living. When I thought my hours, perhaps my minutes, were numbered, I wrote on a paper, shut the missive up in a bottle, and flung it into the sea."

"Afterwards I feared that it might be found and cause my hiding-place to be known, but there have been no inquiries that I have heard of, and I hope that danger is past. Do not look so serious, Mr. Angelo," she laughed. "I really have done nothing to be ashamed of, but still I wish to lie *perdu*."

"If I looked serious, it is because I fear some one has made you suffer, and it stirs my wrath," he said, with that same tremble in his voice, "not because I could ever think it possible for you to do wrong. To me you are one set apart. I could never believe it of you more than I could of a white-winged angel."

"Then I may make my request," she laughed. "If I were vain, Mr. Angelo, your flattery would scarcely do me good. My wish is this, that you will never mention my name to any one, nor speak of me in any way. Words ever spread; let me rest in peace here, my friend, I pray."

"I will confess the truth," he returned. "I have already written of you to Count Angelo."

"Well, I must put up with that, then," she said, smiling still. "He is so far off that it matters less."

"Shall I ask him not to mention you?"

"Not on any account; that would give the idea of mystery to the affair, and I wish my life and actions to be as clear as the noonday. All I say is, speak of me no more, and you will thus show your friendship for me."

"You shall be obeyed," he said; "and now, since it must be, good-bye, may Heaven watch over you. Do not quite forget me, dear. I pray you to remember me sometimes."

Once more he pressed her hand. Again he passionately kissed it, and with a shivering sigh he was gone.

Lady Constance stood just where he had left her, and she sighed too, but there was more of relief than sorrow in the sound. Much as she liked Leoni Angelo, she was growing afraid for him, and she was glad that he was gone.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

VISCOUNT VENWOOD became nearly distracted, and hearing nothing from either Lady Constance nor Stella Eustace, after that one letter before mentioned, the silence became so unbearable to him that he went to town to try and ascertain its cause.

When anything goes wrong between a man and his wife, if the public know no reasons for it, they will invent them for themselves, and innumerable were the stories he heard concerning both Colonel and Lady Constance Vivian, all of which were too high flown to believe. He little thought that he was the innocent cause of that parting.

Of course he found no one at Lady Con-

stance's old home, save the caretakers placed there by the solicitors; and he could learn nothing of her ladyship at all, and concerning Stella, only the fact that she had sailed in the *Mermaid* ages ago, with her father, with no certain destination, and he returned to Norrington Castle in a state of mind not to be described.

The Douglas's ever had powerful feelings and strong passions, and Viscount Venwood was in no wise different from the rest of his race.

His love for Stella was the all-absorbing motive power of his life, even as his father's had been for his mother, and in his mental pain he did not in the least wonder at anything which the Earl might have done to gain her.

The Countess was very busy preparing her eldest daughter for presentation at Court, and was pre-occupied at the thought of the coming London season for her.

Lady Winifred Douglas had blossomed into an eminently beautiful girl, and her parents could not fail to be proud of her.

She resembled the dead and gone beauties whose pictures lined the walls of the old gallery, only her flesh-and-blood freshness made her look far more handsome than the faces upon the canvas, mellowed by time, into very valuable portraits though they were. Young Lady Winifred was a brunette like all the Douglas's.

She was tall, stately, and aristocratic-looking, with finely cut features and raven locks. Her dark eyes sparkling with life and animation.

Her white and even teeth shone out dazzlingly from her red lips.

Every one who saw her remarked that she was a thorough Douglas, but she was so in appearance only—the pride and hardness which distinguished them, though scarcely peasant, was not to be discerned in her nature, which she had inherited from her mother, who would have had an especially sunny one, had not such a blight come over her life in the loss of the man she loved.

Winifred was in the seventh heaven of delight at the prospect of her début, and Hennie looked on with envious eyes at the pretty things being made for her sister.

The Countess, amidst her satisfaction over, and interest in, Winifred, did not fail to notice the restlessness of her son, and the two had many conversations about Stella and Lady Constance Vivian, and agreed in their indignation that any one should speak ill of their friend, but they did not repeat the reports to the Earl.

Little as he liked London, when the time arrived to present his daughter, he accompanied his wife to town, where he quickly heard the tales about the Vivians; and hard though he was upon most women, he would listen to nothing to Lady Constance's prejudice.

"If faults there be, it is on his side, not hers," he told her noisily, over and over again. "Vivian can be beastly enough when he likes, I saw that when he was staying with me at Norrington Castle, and I shall never invite him again; I told the Countess so when he left."

The beauty of Lady Winifred was a matter of town comment, and still more so the evident attentions of more than one most eligible man of fashion; but it scarcely seemed that the girl was in the least struck with any one. If she was, she kept it secret in her own heart, and it must be owned that there was a tender feeling there for an unknown somebody.

She had one morning been riding in the park accompanied only by a young groom, upon a very spirited horse which had just been bought, whose "manners" had in no wise been proved, and the animal having taken fright, had run off with the young fellow, running through the Park gates far away into the distance, out of sight.

This terrified the high-spirited mare upon which Winifred was mounted, and she plunged wildly, and dashed forward after her

stable companion, which had passed her like a railway train at full speed. Winifred, losing her presence of mind, cried aloud for help.

There were but few persons about, but nevertheless, assistance was close at hand.

For a moment she fancied that her brother Stirling, Viscount Venwood, had stopped her horse; the next, she was aware that she had been mistaken, and that the face, although strangely like his, was really handsomer, and free from that proud, hard look, which was the one drawback to the appearance of the gentlemen of the family in the opinion of most people, although there were others who admired that style of masculine beauty.

Leoni Angelo, seeking health, was away from his studio, strolling among the trees and flowers of the Park, when he was attracted by the beauty of a lady rider in the Row, which at that hour was almost entirely deserted.

She rode well, but he fancied somewhat timidly, and he watched her pass more than once, with her groom at some distance behind her upon an exceedingly active steed, which he did not seem at all able to manage.

Then came a violent stampede, the horse shooting by like a rocket.

Lady Winifred's mare lashed out at the passing animal in her terror, reared, and sprang forward to follow.

The girl lost her rein, and in another instant the frightened mare would have followed in the mad career, but Leoni dexterously caught the bridle, threw all his weight upon the horse, and pulled it round, thus staying its course.

He lost his hat in the scuffle, but was not hurt, and the fact of his head being uncovered enhanced his good looks, for his brow was fine, broad, and intellectual, with a look of nobility upon it.

The two pairs of splendid dark eyes gazed at one another earnestly.

Leoni was much struck by the great beauty of the girl, which, as an artist, he appreciated to the full; not only so, he felt attracted towards her, he could not tell why.

She had the same sensation concerning himself, but she imagined she could explain that for the stranger was so like her brother.

"I hope you are not hurt," he said, in his exceptionally sweet voice, as he still held the horse, and patted its neck to pacify it.

"No, thanks to you, I am not," replied Winifred. "But please hold my mare fast, or she will follow the other. How good it is of you to help me!"

"Not at all. I am glad I could be of any use," he said, smiling at her. "Let me give you your rein properly; then, perhaps, you would like to ride on, for a crowd so quickly gathers."

He was right, and one of the crowd brought him his hat.

There had seemed to be only himself there a couple of minutes before, but now there were twenty or thirty people gathered round, and plenty more coming.

Lady Winifred looked nervously about. He understood that timid glance.

"I will not leave you until your groom returns," he said, kindly, walking on beside the mare, who, her frightened was pushing her soft, sensitive nose into Leoni's hand in a very friendly fashion.

They went together a long way, until they met the man riding back, scarcely less fast than he had gone, but this time it was for his own satisfaction, not that of the horse.

"I beg your pardon, my lady," he said; humbly, as he reined up before Lady Winifred, "but if the Earl hears of this I shall lose my place."

"He shall not learn it from me, Sanders," she replied. "You could not help it."

And there came into her mind the knowledge that she would not have been without that slight accident for anything.

It had given her such strange pleasure

walking with the stranger who had helped her with such kindness and courtesy.

This knowledge made the sweet face glow with a flood of unaccustomed colour, and a shy look to rest in the sparkling eyes.

At that moment all such signs of interest were lost upon Leoni. He had helped Lady Winifred, as he would have done any other woman in distress; but his heart was in Llanrochen Bay, with Lady Constance Vivian. In fact, if he thought at all about her dimpling blushes, he thought they were because she scarcely knew how to dismiss him; so he determined to help her.

He took off his hat, and stood, with a bow, bare-headed before her.

"Good day," he said, quietly; "I am truly glad to have rendered you so slight a service, and wish you a pleasant ride home."

She wanted so much to thank him. His wished greatly to shake his hand, the hand which had stayed her danger; but he did not seem to expect it—rather, he evidently wished her to ride on, now that he could be of no further use to her, and she obeyed his suggestion.

It was a small incident over which to lose a heart, and yet Winifred undoubtedly lost hers that morning to the unknown individual, whose happy interference at that critical moment she told herself had probably saved her life.

Winifred never mentioned that meeting to any one, and when, some days later, she was once more riding in the Row with some ladies and gentlemen of her acquaintance, she saw Leoni again; her bright face showed her pleasure at the sight of him; but he in no way traded upon their former introduction, and merely raised his hat courteously as she passed him by.

"A relation of yours, Lady Winifred, I suppose?" said Miss Conyers. "I detect a strong family likeness!"

"Impossible!" she replied. "We have no relations that I have ever heard of. That gentleman is a chance acquaintance; but I confess he has a look of my brother."

"I don't know your brother; but he is awfully like you, my dearest! Come, tell us who your handsome friend is! I declare, Lord Markham, Lady Winifred is blushing," and Miss Conyers laughed wickedly.

Lord Markham was one of those *oiled feathers* of society who make things run smoothly for their friends; when it does not give them too much trouble, and seeing Lady Winifred's confusion, he determined to help her.

"No one need blush to have the acquaintance of so rising a young fellow, Miss Conyers. I can tell you who he is. He is Leoni Angelo the much-talked-of Italian artist, who is making a great name for himself for figure drawing, or, I should almost say, drawing heads. His studio is worth seeing, I understand. I mean to go when I get hold of some one who knows him. These fellows are very interesting Bohemians, and say far more of the world than we who tread the beaten track."

"I will give him an order to paint my portrait, then I can take you to his studio, Lord Markham," said rich Miss Conyers, regardless of her remarkably plain face.

"I doubt if he would undertake anything in that line," laughed his lordship with a hidden smile in his remark.

"He is not a portrait painter, you mean; but artists seldom refuse money, so we will see," she replied, with a toss of her head. "He is a handsome man, and I will make his acquaintance, and see his studio too!" but to the mortification of Miss Conyers, Leoni Angelo refused to paint her portrait, so she had nothing left her to do but to abuse his pictures, which she did freely.

Lady Winifred had greatly longed to know who the young man was who she deemed a hero, and was much interested in Lord Markham's information, but she said never a word, and did her best to keep her feelings to herself.

self, for she did not wish talkative Miss Constanza to discover that she was bowing to a man whose very name she did not know.

She had heard Leonie spoken of as a talented artist, and from that time she worried her mother continually to take her to exhibitions of pictures, and ferreted out his name whenever he was an exhibitor.

Leonie Angelo and his doings were a part of the life-interest of Lady Winifred Douglas; but so far he only thought of her as the remarkably pretty girl who he had had the pleasure of assisting at an awkward moment, and who he sometimes saw ride past him upon those rare occasions when he indulged himself in a peep at the "Row."

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

On board the *Mermaid* there were very many conversations of a serious nature. Sir John was a great help to Colonel Vivian in hearing of his trouble, for he drew him into speaking of it, and let in upon it the light of his own kindly mind.

Moreover, he was a staunch friend to Lady Constance, and breathed her name with such tender reverence that the Colonel was both touched and influenced by it, and the husband laid the entire blame of his trouble upon Viscount Venwood, who, he persuaded Sir John, had done his very best to lead his wife from the path of right and honour, and being human, was ready enough to believe anything against a son of the Earl of Douglas, and so believing, he deemed him a dishonourable man, and one totally unfit for his daughter Stella; so, more than ever he determined that she should never marry him, and by every means in his power to induce her to become the wife of his favourite Joseph Pennington, who was absolutely dreading his arrival in England for fear it should part him from the woman he loved, while Isola helped on the tangle by becoming more devoted to honest Jo every day, although she had not once thought of herself in the matter, but merely of him and his happiness.

One more the *Mermaid* was skimming the blue water, homeward bound, and those on board were on the watch for the first glimpse of land.

Colonel Vivian appeared to be quite strong again.

The tall, erect figure was held at its full height, but the face which had been so handsome was greatly changed.

It had an ugly scar upon it, where it had been torn by the lionsess in her fury, nor was this the only disfigurement, and the expression which used to be so full of brightness and animation was now dark and melancholy. In those days Colonel Vivian was seldom seen to smile, never to laugh.

It was a crucified look, which made you pause and shiver, to think what the heart within must be suffering. Yes! and it was suffering too. It was torn by many conflicting emotions.

His anger against his wife had turned and settled in the face of death. He could not war against cold clay. He could not have done it had she been in fault, but he no longer believed that. Against her his wrath was dead, but it was alive still, and actively so, concerning Viscount Venwood.

His one desire was to meet him face to face, and to make him feel his wrathful indignation.

As for his poor wife, he meant to go to Llanroock Bay, and to learn all he could of her.

A hope was within his heart that her body might have been found, and that he might yet kneel beside her resting-place and crave her pardon; and unimaginative, as he usually was, he thought, her sweet spirit might there comfort him, and bring rest to his weary soul. His soul was very weary, indeed.

All the brightness had passed out of his life, for hope had fled for ever.

In all his anger and mad jealousy there lurked that one bright beacon star.

He assured himself that there was no hope of a reconciliation between his wife and himself, but still it did not crush out the light.

He was then like a shipwrecked mariner upon the Goodwin Sands—who tells himself that he is lost, who yet can see the lighthouse of promise, and knows he may be saved.

But the light had gone out for Colonel Vivian.

He had never loved but one woman in his life, and now she was dead.

Never would he now be able to tell her how he had missed her, and how sad his life away from her had been; never press her to his breast again with that strong, hungry, passionate love which he had felt for her.

All that was a thing of the past, and so was his joy in existence.

Moreover, he was left with the keen pain of remembering what might have been, and what he had not only suffered himself, but caused her to suffer too—and the recollection was a real pain to him.

Well he knew that his future life needs must be one tract of desolation, from which he would very gladly escape if he knew how; but he knew there was no way, for he was not the man to escape earthly troubles by the soul-sin of suicide.

He was deeply affected when he saw the white protecting cliffs of Old England, where his joy had been so intense and his suffering so keen as to cause him to fly from it.

When he had quitted it he had left his wife there—the wife against whom jealousy had maddened him, but whom he now knew he had never ceased to love for one short moment.

The change was within himself. He had for the time been mad—actually mad. Now the fever was past—and he was left to bear his pain as bravely as he could; but when the voice of conscience speaks and tells a man that he himself is not altogether blameless, then he is not so brave as he might be, but his courage is tinged with the grey hues of self-reproach.

His breast heaved as England came in sight, and he grasped the side of the yacht with a hand which was not free from a tremble.

Sir John seemed to understand his feelings. He linked his hand within his arm affectionately.

"There is no place like it, Vivian," he said, "I was glad to get away, and I am precious glad to get back, I can tell you. Come and stay with us as long as you please. You will be heartily welcome. When we started to meet you I was not very amably disposed towards you, but now I grieve for you both; yet, old friend, I feel most for her. A woman is such a dependent creature. Love is everything to her, and when she loses it she has lost all. She loved you to the end, Vivian; and I know I am carrying out her wishes when I ask you to make your home with us for as long as you are happy with Stella and her old dad."

"You are too good, Eustace," he replied, with a smile, "and you are right. Constance regarded you before all her other friends, and would like to think of your kindness to me, I am sure; but first I must go to Llanroock Bay. I shall have no peace till I have visited her grave."

"Do not dwell too much on the thought, my dear Vivian. She may have no green mound to mark the spot where she lies."

"Heaven grant that I shall find it, and that I may be permitted to take her to the vault where my ancestors lie, where my own bones will rest in peace with hers," said the Colonel earnestly.

"Well, well, my dear fellow," returned the Baronet, with haste, "I can quite understand your feelings; nevertheless, there is much of romance in such thoughts, and I doubt not

our sleep is just as deep and restful wherever we are.

"Look over there and tell me how you think matters are going. I will acknowledge to you that that is the man I should wish to see Stella's husband.

"Are you good at reading the ways of lovers? Have you noticed how fond Pennington is of the girl? and he is worthy of her, too; a better fellow does not live. I hope they will settle it all before they go on shore. From what Jo said to me last night he means to put his luck to the test before we reach England, and I think he is wise."

Not one word had Sir John spoken of Stella's attachment to Viscount Venwood.

Before he heard the Colonel's story, he had decided against his daughter's choice, and how much more so afterwards.

Colonel Vivian looked across the vessel and saw the pair standing together. Mr. Pennington was fixing a telescope to suit the girl's vision, and Isola was sitting at a little distance watching him.

The sun was shining brightly. There was scarcely a cloud in the sky, only a few vaporous ones floated every now and then unnoticed over the blue ether.

"Can you discern it plainly?" asked the man. "Does that quite suit your sight? What do you see? What is your first impression upon seeing home again?"

"The dearest spot on earth to me is home, sweet home," she sang, "and I see its bonnie white cliffs set in the azure sky, and the sapphire and silver sea. I am very glad the trip is over, and we have got safely back, Mr. Pennington, are not you?"

She was not looking at him, but gazing out before her, glass in hand, thinking little or nothing about her companion. Indeed, her thoughts had travelled to Norrington Castle, and she was wondering how she was to let her lover know of her return, and how she was in the future to get her letters to him.

She never for one moment questioned whether he was true to her. They had plighted their love, and she did not trouble herself with useless and dishonouring doubts of her lover.

She had two thoughts in her mind.

One was to cast herself upon her father's love in the matter; the other, to ask for Colonel Vivian's help for his dead wife's sake; but so far she had not really decided how to act.

If she had not seen the expression upon Mr. Pennington's face, some one else had. Isola, always watching him with love's observant eyes, had seen at once how his face was turned to Stella, full of a deep and yearning affection, and had noticed also that it was in no wise reciprocated.

She crept to Stella's side. She could not bear to see that look of keen anxiety upon the kindly features.

In another moment her arms were about the girl's neck, and the bright head was bent down to listen to the hurried words, while Stella wondered at the flushed, excited face of her young friend whom she had chosen as a sister.

"Darling, darling, kind, gentle Stella," she whispered, "be as kind to others as you are to me. He is no, so good, do not give him pain. He wants you to listen so very, very much. Promise, dear, that you will hear all he has to say, every, every word; and remember no truer man breathes on earth."

"My dear Isola," exclaimed Stella, laughingly, "how you do run on. Of course I will listen to everything which is said to me. It would be impolite not to do so; but who are your glowing praises of, in the name of goodness?"

"You don't know?"

"Not in the least!"

"Oh! Stella!" and with a look of reproach Isola was gone.

Stella Eustace looked after her in unfeigned surprise, and turned to speak of Isola's quaint

whispered pleading laughingly to Mr. Penning-



[LEONI DEXTEROUSLY CAUGHT THE REIN, AND THROWING ALL HIS WEIGHT UPON THE HORSE, PULLED IT ROUND.]

ton, but something in his earnest face stayed her.

A sudden light flooded in upon her mind.

She met that gaze timidly.

She liked honest Jo Pennington as well as if he had been her brother, and the dread of giving him pain came upon her overwhelmingly.

"I think I will go below for a little while," she said. "Isola has run away, and I may find her in the cabin."

She rose as she spoke and hurried down the companion ladder, and Mr. Pennington followed her.

He closed the door notwithstanding the warmth of the day, and went straight over to her and stood before her.

"I came to look for the fairy," she said, nervously. "You will excuse me, Mr. Pennington if I run away from you?"

"No," he answered slowly but firmly. "I must ask you to let me speak now. You see our time is getting very short. We may have to part so soon, and the fairy will be your shadow for many a long day. Will you not sit down and hear me out? I have so very much to say to you."

He led her to a chair, and she followed out his wishes, with a dull fear settling about her heart that something very unpleasant was coming, for Stella was not one of those girls who consider the conquest of hearts an enjoyable pastime, but rather trembled at the thought of the sacred fire of affection being stirred by unloved hands.

"Stella," he continued, "do you know what I am going to say to you? Surely you must have guessed my secret many months ago! I loved you, darling, from the first hour I came on board the *Mermaid*, and your good father introduced you to me."

"I had not before known the joy of the companionship of a gentle woman. I have neither mother nor sister to cheer me, and my path in life has been but little blessed with

human sympathy. You and Sir John are the two best friends I have ever known."

"Let us continue to be so," she said, with a smile, "and you must include little Isola; the child has a dog-like affection for you. She watches your every movement with anxious eyes."

"She is a dear little soul, but she is, as you say a child, and my soul needs a woman's love, not a child's reasonless devotion."

"Stella, I have loved you for so long, so very long, have you never found it out for yourself? Have you been so utterly blind to the worship of my heart? Darling, for the love of Heaven speak to me—give me hope. I have waited until the last because I have feared perhaps that you did not understand, and I have feared myself to cast a shadow between us, but, oh! my dear, we cannot part like this. I must have some definite place in your mind."

"Sir John bade me wait, that you might learn to lean on me, dear."

"I know I am not worthy of such a prize, I am plain, and there is nothing to desire in me, while you, sweet one, are perfect. But no man could offer you a more passionate love or a truer heart. Stella, Stella, speak to me, or that heart will break with longing for you!" and the pleading voice was touched with real pain.

Stella Eustace clasped her hands together nervously, and looked at him with sorrowful eyes, all laden with heavy tears.

"Oh! I am so very, very sorry," she said, simply. "Indeed I did not know, and I like you sincerely, believe me."

"Cannot you *love* me, dear?" he pleaded with a passionate thrill in his voice. "Is it not to be, after all?"

"It is utterly impossible," she cried, almost sharply. "Why do you make me give you pain? It can never be, although I will gladly be your friend if you will let me."

There was a long silence.

He broke it.

"Stella," he whispered, "is your heart already given away? If not, I will serve you till you can love me. Were it ice itself the warmth of my strong love must surely melt it."

"Yes," she said, very gently; "my friend, it was given away long, long before you and I ever met, and it was given for ever."

His face was drooped between his hands.

She laid her cheek to one in tender pity for his suffering, then left him to fight with his pain alone.

Isola crept to the door.

She saw Stella go.

She never spoke one word, but she went and knelt at his feet, as it were to share his sorrow.

Stella was right. Hers was a dog-like love

(To be continued.)

EACH day brings its own duties, and carries them along with it; and they are as waves broken on the shore, many, like them, coming after, but none ever the same.

When Maximilian, one of the early German emperors, returned with his victorious troops from a foreign war he was greeted in Augsburg with a salute which was intended to be of a hundred shots. The master of artillery, however, became confused, and when the one hundredth shot had been fired he was uncertain whether it was the hundredth or only the ninety-ninth. Preferring to err on the safe side, he ordered another shot to be fired. When the emperor reached Nuremberg the people of that city, determined not to be outdone by the Augsburgers, also saluted him with a hundred and one shots. This is said to be the origin of the royal "salute of a hundred and one guns."



[THE TONGUES OF FLAME SHOT UPWARDS, FAINTLY REVEALING THE CRUEL ROCKS ON TO WHICH THE "SEAGULL" WAS DRIFTING!]

NOVELETTE.]

## A GOLDEN PLEDGE.

—:0:—

## CHAPTER I.

SIR LIONEL CAREW's yacht, the *Seagull*, spread its white wings and sailed away to the sunny Mediterranean with a gay little party of pleasure-seeking men and women on board.

The young Baronet had worked hard all through the summer session, now he was bent upon obtaining rest and change. Perhaps the haunting trouble, the constant sense of loss that oppressed him, would disappear beneath the influence of fresh scenes and enjoyments. If the divorce from self, and the bitter memory of a girl's fair face proved only temporary it would still be worth having.

He resolved to yield himself up unconditionally to pleasure in the endeavour to stifle the one unsatisfied longing that had ever fallen to his share. Then, with work and ambition to fall back upon, he flattered himself that he would not be altogether unhappy.

A man of the world with plenty of *savoir-vivre*, and a tolerably extensive knowledge of human nature, as he had studied it in many climes, and under a multiplicity of aspects, there were few pleasures, worthy of the name, that Sir Lionel Carew had accepted upon second-hand evidence only.

To be young, rich, and in the enjoyment of perfect health, implies, save in very exceptional cases, a love of pleasure. Thus far Lionel Carew had lived his life in the fullest sense of the word, making the most of the good things the gods had sent him. On this occasion, however, the yachting cruise, Paris, Monaco, alike, seemed tame and insupportable. The angry sorrow, the unsatisfied yearning, from which he had in vain attempted to escape, marred all his enjoyment.

He chose an odd way of trying to forget the girl who had bewitched him by mentally contrasting her with many of the women he met abroad. Some of these far out-distanced her in beauty, wit, or talent, yet Lionel Carew failed to come across one who owned that peculiar blending of all these qualities, combined with subtle womanly grace, which had first attracted him towards his enchantress.

More than once the young man detected himself in the act of anticipating the time when he would be free to return to town and resume his parliamentary duties. Hard reading and hard thinking would be more likely to ensure the desired forgetfulness than this dreary semblance of pleasure.

He was angry at heart with this girl for having rejected him, for rendering herself essential to his happiness, and then refusing to accept the responsibility of guarding it. Lionel Carew was not a vain or conceited man, yet, as the owner of an unencumbered estate, and a large income, he knew his own value in the fashionable marriage market. He knew how eagerly mothers and daughters had competed for his favour.

He had turned aside, however, from those who would gladly have welcomed his attentions to woo a penniless girl, a mere nobody, and she had actually refused to become his wife, a state of things he felt quite justified in resenting.

He had first met Elaine Verschoyle while on a flying visit to his aunt, an austere maiden lady, of rigid principles and narrow sympathies, residing in a lonely part of Westmoreland.

Elaine acted as Miss Sutton's companion, a dreary position for a young girl, her employer exacting a full meed of service in return for the meagre board and scanty wages given.

Sir Lionel's first feeling of compassion for Elaine had quickly been replaced by a more

ardent one, as the girl's rare beauty and grace made a deep impression upon him.

On one never-to-be-forgotten evening the young baronet, taking advantage of Miss Sutton's temporary absence, had revealed his passion to Elaine, and besought her with all the fervour and eloquence of which he was capable to become his wife.

To his surprise and disappointment he met with a decided refusal. Elaine had declared frankly that she neither could nor would marry him, while expressing herself in no wise insensible to the honour contained in such a proposal.

When Lionel Carew begged hard for a more explicit reason, and objected to accept her answer as final, Elaine grew almost angry. Just in the very heat of their animated discussion Miss Sutton had unexpectedly appeared upon the scene.

The grim spinster drew her own inferences from what she had seen and heard, inferences decidedly unfavourable to Elaine, whom she mentally accused of encouraging her nephew's attentions, and doing her best to entrap him. When Lionel Carew returned to the house next day, after a long ride, it was to find Elaine Verschoyle gone.

Miss Sutton, without any previous allusion to her resolve, had promptly discharged her young companion, and sent her adrift, while refusing to give Lionel Carew any information by which he might succeed in tracing her.

Angry words and mutual recriminations had ensued between aunt and nephew. Lionel Carew left Miss Sutton's house, vowing never to re-enter it.

Since then all his spare time had been absorbed in the endeavour to find Elaine Verschoyle.

As each fresh attempt to trace her proved fruitless, his passionate love for this girl, whom he had unintentionally deprived of a home, grew stronger and deeper, by reason of

the hindrances and obstacles that only served to quicken and intensify it.

"I must succeed in finding her eventually," was the thought passing through his mind as he paced to and fro the deck one day, smoking a cigarette.

"She cannot always evade me. Why should she seek to do so? That is the mystery. I managed to elicit the fact of there being no prior attachment in question. Surely in time she might learn to care a little for me. I should not be exigent in my demands. Only to win her would in itself be sufficient happiness. Yet I am as far off as ever from realising my desire, and this cursed uncertainty, this forced inaction, well-nigh maddens me!"

Patience was not one of Lionel Carew's virtues. A spoiled child of fortune, he had from his earliest years been taught to regard himself as the centre around which less important persons and objects should revolve.

It is always the happy and the prosperous who murmur loudly when misfortune overtakes them, or their will is crossed by circumstances.

Those who have served a long apprenticeship to sorrow, loss, or disappointment, come in time to regard these things as a matter of course; they accept them with scarcely a word of complaint.

Brought up by the wealthy uncle who had made him his sole heir, Lionel Carew's life had been early cast in pleasant places. Sir Francis was not compelled to leave his nephew more than the bare title; the estate not being strictly entitled.

Yet the childless man had seen fit to bequeath all to his favourite Lionel, the will bearing date a few years previous to his decease.

Fortune, whose gifts, whether good or bad, are seldom bestowed singly, had endowed Lionel Carew with a vigorous intellect and physical beauty in addition to health.

Tall and slim, with fair hair, handsome dreamy grey eyes, and a drooping moustache, the baronet might have achieved many a conquest, irrespective of his large fortune, had he been in the mood to take a woman's heart by storm.

Yet, owing to some strange perversity, the one heart he would fain have brought into willing subjection was closed and barred against him, and the knowledge of this rendered life insufferably flat and monotonous to the young man, extracting all zest from the pleasures and pursuits which, in themselves, had once seemed sufficient to render life worth living.

Lionel Carew felt relieved when, by twos and threes, the yachting party, which everyone but himself regarded as a brilliant success, dispersed, until only two or three men were left on board in addition to the crew.

It left him more at liberty to brood over his unsatisfactory love-affair, and devise fresh schemes, having as their object the ultimate discovery of *Elaine Versophyle*.

The yachting cruise had been extended far into the autumn.

Any day the long run of fair weather they had enjoyed might give place to Equinoctial gales, to cloudy skies and storm-tossed seas.

"We're within easy distance of home now, Lennox," remarked Lionel Carew to his captain one evening, as the two men stood together on deck. "Ours has been a cruise without one incident worth recording."

"We've met with no disasters of any kind, Sir Lionel," was the reply. "You must balance that against the absence of all exciting incident."

Bruce Lennox, the captain of the *Seagull*, was a tall, splendidly-built man of thirty, with deep, penetrating, hazel eyes, regular features, and a crisp, silvery-brown beard.

He had been recommended to Lionel Carew by a friend, and his thorough knowledge of seamanship rendered him a most efficient captain.

Only three months previous Bruce Lennox had taken unto himself a young wife, a

pretty, dark-eyed girl of eighteen, and installed her in a quaint old house, standing by itself on the cliffs near Beachford, a rising watering place and sea-port.

Bruce Lennox loved his young wife passionately.

It had cost him an effort to leave her so soon after their marriage, and he was looking forward eagerly to their approaching reunion.

It was a glorious evening!

The opalescent tints of sea and sky seemed to blend and merge.

The clear, still atmosphere, the light breeze, the water, with scarce a ripple on it, seemed to imply a continuance of fair weather.

Yet Bruce Lennox, looking away towards the horizon, detected signs of approaching storm, imperceptible to a landsman.

"We are enjoying almost the last of the fine weather, Sir Lionel," he remarked. "The storm the Americans predicted will overtake us in less than twenty-four hours. It would be risky to encounter it here. We had better make for Beachford while the wind holds favourable, and lie-to in the harbour till the gale is over."

Lionel Carew smiled.

"Interested advice, Lennox," he said, laughingly. "By selecting your home as our haven of refuge you will get an opportunity of spending a few hours, or days, as the case may be, with your wife. How am I to dispose of myself during that time? So far as I am concerned, Beachford holds out no attraction."

"It is the neatest harbour," rejoined Lennox, "that is why I suggested going there. The storm may overtake us even sooner than I anticipated; this calm is ominous. Since the yacht will be laid up for the winter in less than a fortnight, I can easily wait until then, so far as Muriel, my wife, is concerned."

"All right, old man," said Lionel Carew, good-humouredly; "it would have been very pardonable if you had thought first of your bride. And you're a lucky fellow to have someone to care for you. I suppose in your case marriage is not a failure?"

"A failure! far from that," said Lennox. "Muriel and I are all the world to each other, and when that is the case, Sir Lionel, marriage means little short of perfect happiness."

Lionel Carew gave vent to an impatient sigh.

Why had this happiness, so ardently desired, been withheld from him, he reflected bitterly. He could have found it in his heart to envy Lennox his wedded bliss.

The captain's weather forecast proved only too correct. As night fell the sky grew dull and cloudy, a streak of white foam began to fringe the tops of the dark-blue swells, the wind rose and whistled among the cordage, while rain fell heavily.

The *Seagull* was but a small yacht to ride out a heavy gale. Her owner and the captain decided to run at once for Beachford.

The gale increased rapidly in fury. Wave after wave swept the deck. Even the crew found it difficult to retain their footing on the wet, slippery boards, and darkness that could be felt settled down like a pall, blotting out the land from sight. The friends who had remained on board with Ernest Carew began to look rather serious.

"I say, Carew, we shall hold you responsible for our safety, you know," remarked Teddy Carrington, the younger son of an impecunious lord. "I hope the craft is seaworthy. How long will it take us to reach Beachford? This playing at pitch and tow is perfectly illegal. I object to it; on principle."

"We ought to see the lights of Beachford now," said Lionel Carew, rather anxiously; "but this confounded darkness is so bewildering."

By-and-by it blew a gale of wind, and at the tail of the storm descended a fog so thick that Captain Lennox found it impossible to

ascertain his bearings, or know if they were nearing shore.

It had grown intensely cold, and the air was so thick they seemed to breathe sponge. The darkness and horror of the night became intensified.

The strain of the yacht's timbers was so great that there was the strongest possibility of her going to pieces without the agency of anything harder than water.

All on board recognised the dangerous nature of their position.

Should they succeed in making Beachford Harbour all would be well; but the fog rendered them almost helpless, and on the other side of the harbour below the cliffs stretched a long line of jagged rocks, upon which many a vessel had gone to pieces.

Lionel Carew, well acquainted with the coast, had these rocks upon his mind.

"If we drift upon them it will be all over with us," he reflected. "In such a sea the yacht will go to pieces directly, while the fog will prevent those on shore from attempting a rescue."

"Have you the least idea, Lennox, as to where we are?" he inquired, in a low tone, of the captain.

"Just off Beachford, I believe," was the reply, "Listen!" as a dull sound resounded their ears. "That is the foghorn. We must be very close in. I'd give a good deal to know which side of the harbour we are on."

"It is horrible to think we may be drifting straight onto the rocks," said Lionel Carew, impatiently. "If this fog would only lift! There goes the foghorn again. The sound seems to come from the left."

"In that case we are all right. Good heavens, Sir Lionel, look there!"

High above their heads, at what appeared to be close quarters, a lurid gleam suddenly pierced through the fog; tongues of flame shot upwards, faintly revealing the face of the perpendicular cliff and the cruel rocks at its base.

A cry of horror burst from all on deck. They were drifting straight on to the rocks.

The beacon—by whom lighted?—had revealed their terrible position only just in time.

A scene of confusion ensued.

Captain Lennox, issuing hurried orders to his crew, seemed to be here, there, and everywhere.

It was only a few moments, yet it appeared an age ere the yacht swung slowly round, and changed her course.

Galed by the unknown bonfire on the cliff, the flames of which was still leaping skyward, the *Seagull* headed straight for the harbour, and entered it half an hour later, with torn sails and splintered masts, but otherwise uninjured.

"It was the beacon that saved us," said Bruce Lennox, wiping the moisture from his brow. "We all owe our lives to it. Another moment, and we should have been on the rocks. Whoever lighted that deserves a reward."

"And he shall have it, too," rejoined Lionel Carew, as they entered the inner basin, or harbour, amid the cheers of the assembled townspeople. "The flames shot up just in the nick of time!"

Bruce Lennox was well known and much liked in Beachford. He had lived there nearly all his life. His marriage had taken place in the grey old parish church; yet, as he stepped on shore, none of those present attempted to grasp his hand.

As soon as the *Seagull* was recognised a strange silence had fallen upon the men and women assembled. Awed, compassionate glances met Bruce Lennox in every direction.

"We've had a narrow escape," he remarked to the harbour-master, a friend of his, who came forward at this moment. "We owe our lives to the man who lighted that bonfire on the cliff, Simmons. I should like to shake hands with him, whoever he is."

Simmons, a short, stout, sun-burnt individual, shuddered as the other spoke.

"Don't, for Heaven's sake, say that!" he exclaimed, hoarsely, placing a big, brown hand on Bruce Lennox's arm.

"But it's the truth," persisted Lennox.

"We should have been on the rocks but for the flames that pointed out our danger. Why, man alive," catching sight of the other's blanched face, "what is the matter with you? Why do you look at me so strangely?"

The gale still raged, but the fog had lifted, and dawn was breaking.

It struck Bruce Lennox as odd that so many people should be astir at that early hour. A vague presentiment of evil took possession of him.

"What is it?" he asked, impatiently. "What has happened?"

"The—the fire on the cliff," stammered Simmons. "Lennox, my poor fellow, I don't know how to tell you—my heart bleeds for you. You saw it; it saved your lives, you say, yet, had you known, you'd rather have gone down with all hands than been saved at such a cost."

Bruce Lennox's face turned ghastly pale; he staggered as if about to fall.

"Then it was not a bonfire?" he cried, in a voice strangely unlike his own, as a sudden terrible light broke upon him. "Merciful Heaven! do you mean to say the flames proceeded from my own house—that it was burnt down last night?"

"I do," said Simmons, solemnly. "Burnt to the ground."

Bruce Lennox grasped him fiercely in his anguish.

"My wife, Muriel!" he exclaimed, "what of her? Was she in the house at the time?"

"She was—Lennox, try to bear it like a man. The old house burnt fiercely. Your wife and the servant-girl both perished in the flames. It wasn't possible to save them, although every effort was made. That was the fire you saw on the cliff!"

"Muriel, my girl!" cried Bruce Lennox, hoarsely. "Dead! I can't believe it, I won't. It is too—"

His voice faltered suddenly, he threw up his arms; a thin stream of blood issued from his lips, as he fell senseless at the harbour-master's feet.

## CHAPTER II.

A few hours later Bruce Lennox stood by the smoking ruins of what had once been a pleasant homestead.

Unmindful of the doctor's protest against such dangerous exertion so soon after the breaking of a blood-vessel he had insisted upon going to the spot where his young wife had met her fate.

Lionel Carew, full of sympathy for the bereaved man, had accompanied him.

The quaint, picturesque old house on the cliff, which had belonged to Bruce Lennox's parents before him, had consisted chiefly of timber. How it had caught light no one knew, but once in flames it had burnt fiercely, precluding all hope of rescuing the inmates.

A shapeless mass of ruins was all that remained of the home to which Bruce Lennox had brought his girl-bride only three months previous; even the walls had fallen in. The pretty, well-kept garden, sodden with water, trampled down by many feet, was converted into a wilderness. The fire had done its work thoroughly.

The sun was shining brightly after the storm. Beyond that blackened, smoking spot, that hideous heap of ruins, a blot on the fair landscape, stretched the smooth green award. Far below the waves broke gently on the shore.

There were hundreds of people present, watching the men engaged in searching for the bodies; but they spoke in whispers, and held aloof from Bruce Lennox. His great grief, his terrible bereavement, invested him with a

kind of sanctity in their sight; they feared to approach him.

"Sure, there never was a sadder fire than that which lighted her to her death, poor girl, and him back to life," murmured a woman, with a sympathetic glance in the Captain's direction. "He looks as if he would gladly change places with his young wife at this moment. I never saw a man so altered."

Bruce Lennox had aged ten years in appearance within the last few hours. He said but little, but his white drawn face, and the burning anguish in his eyes revealed the extent of his suffering. Not for one moment did his gaze wander from the smoking ruins, and the men at work there.

"Lennox, my poor fellow," said Lionel Carew, kindly, "be persuaded by me. Don't stay here any longer. Go back to the yacht; I will remain in your stead to ascertain the result of the search. Better, far better, to think of her as she was when you last parted, than to gaze on her disfigured remains."

"You mean well, Sir Lionel, and I am not ungrateful," was the reply; "but I cannot stir from this spot until she has been found. What can have become of it all, I wonder?"

"Become of what?"

"Her beauty, her grace, her glad young life. They are not lying beneath those charred timbers. Do they still exist in another state of being? Oh, I can't understand it! Muriel loved me so well that, were she permitted to, even in the spirit she would come back to me. If she has forgotten me she is no longer Muriel. Oh, my wife, my wife, how many years must elapse ere we meet again?"

He turned away as he spoke to hide the tears that sprang to his eyes. There is something awe-inspiring in the sight of a strong man's anguish. Lionel Carew felt himself powerless to administer consolation. He could only look on in silence, his heart full of compassion.

The men worked steadily on, but they failed to discover the bodies of Muriel Lennox and her servant. A few charred bones, some fragments of female attire, alone rewarded their search. The fire had raged too fiercely to leave any further evidence. Each poor remains as they discovered were reverently collected, and placed in a coffin pending the inquest. Recognition was out of the question. Not even the sad satisfaction of recovering Muriel's body was vouchsafed to Bruce Lennox.

"I wish you could find the ring my wife wore—her wedding-ring I mean," he said to the men, in dull mechanical tones. "I will give five guineas to the man who brings it to me. It has been in our family for many years," he continued, turning to Lionel Carew. "My mother wore it before my wife. It is curiously chased, and has the words 'Love's Golden Pledge,' engraved on it. It seems to me that until the ring is found I shall never realize that I have really lost her. I don't know whether this sorrow is affecting my mind, but I cannot think of Muriel as dead."

Glancing at the speaker's haggard face and wild eyes, Lionel Carew felt very apprehensive with regard to his sanity.

Day after day Bruce Lennox hovered around the scene of the catastrophe, as if unable to quit it.

The inquest took place, the unrecognizable remains found received Christian burial, and Lionel Carew felt the need of returning to town.

Before quitting Beachford, however, he tried to ascertain what Bruce Lennox's plans for the future consisted of.

The yacht would shortly be laid up for the winter, and the crew discharged.

He was willing, however, to retain Lennox in his capacity of captain, but the latter refused to avail himself of this generous offer.

Bruce Lennox had a small income, which rendered him comparatively independent.

He had no intention, he said, of seeking any fresh occupation at present.

He should roam about from place to place, until he felt capable of accepting a responsible post again.

"And the house—will you have that rebuilt?" inquired Lionel Carew.

Bruce Lennox shuddered.

"No," he replied. "If I did I should never be able to live in it. It would be a haunted house to me, Sir Lionel, haunted by the memories of the past. I shall sell the ground on which it stood, and make my home elsewhere."

"Take my advice," said Carew, "and get another berth ere long. Regular occupation, set duties, will do more to distract your mind from dwelling on the loss you have sustained than mere aimless wandering about."

The two men parted on the most friendly terms, Lionel Carew returning to town, Bruce Lennox remaining at Beachford.

The dramatic incident of the burning house, in the flames of which his young wife had perished, while they served as a beacon to preserve him from shipwreck, had become widely circulated, and Bruce Lennox's "unlikeness" had appeared in several illustrated papers.

People turned to look after him outdoors, but he never heeded their curiosity or compassion.

He walked about like a man in a dream, still making a daily pilgrimage to the scene of the late disastrous fire.

Muriel Lennox's wedding ring had never been recovered, although the liberal reward offered for it had led to a very careful search among the debris.

It had disappeared as completely as the young wife herself.

Not for one moment, sleeping or waking, did the bereaved man's thoughts wander from the memory of that sweet girl-bride.

In the long night watches she seemed to stand beside him again in her fresh young beauty, the long lashes entwining her soft cheek, lashes half shading the dark sweetness of her eyes, the waves of warm coloured auburn hair rippling almost to the little white feet.

Then, as he stretched out his arms in passionate yearning, the fair phantom vanished.

He could not press his lips to those soft, blooming ones of hers.

It had been a love-match on both sides. Muriel had fully returned his affection, and the newly-married pair had been all-in-all to each other.

Bruce Lennox, bitterly self-reproachful that he had quitted his girl-wife for a while to take the command of the *Seagull*, set himself to gain what information he could with regard to her movements on the day immediately preceding the fire.

They appeared to have been of the most ordinary kind.

Muriel had done some shopping in Beachford, and called upon several acquaintances, alighting more than once to her husband's approaching return, and the pleasure it afforded her.

The last person Bruce Lennox interviewed was a fisherman, whose cottage stood not far from his own ruined home.

"Did you see Mrs. Lennox on the evening previous to the fire, Mat?" he asked of the man, as he sat mending his nets.

"Ay, that I did, captain," was the reply. "She had been out walking, and she passed close to me on her way home. I noticed that she looked a bit pale, and her eyes were red, as if she had been crying. It struck me more through her being so brisk and bright as a rule. She said, 'good evening, Mat,' as she passed. I watched her go slowly towards the house, and I never saw her again."

"And that is all you can tell me?" said Bruce Lennox, trying in vain to account for his wife's unwanted despondency as described by Mat.

Was it possible that some trouble had

befallen her during his absence, of which she had made no mention in her frequent letters.

"That's all, captain. Stay, though. Two days previous to the fire Mrs. Lennox had a visitor, a tall elderly gent, with iron gray hair and moustache. He asked me the way to Cliff Cottage, as I sat here mending my nets. I should think he stayed nigh upon a couple of hours."

"Can you describe this gentleman to me, Mat, a little more closely?"

"I should say he was on the wrong side of fifty," continued Mat; "very broad shouldered, with dark eyes that seemed to look right through you, and a thick grey moustache."

Bruce Lennox failed to identify the man thus described with any of his own friends and acquaintances, or Muriel's. He was at a loss to know who this mysterious visitor could have been.

### CHAPTER III.

"HILDA, if you are going to ride in the park with Lionel this morning it is time you donned your habit. Put that novel down, lazy girl, and run upstairs at once. Lion hates to be kept waiting."

The speaker, a dark, vivacious little lady, with clear-cut features, sparkling eyes, and a decisive manner, tilted the lounging chair playfully until its occupant, a tall, fair-haired, blue-eyed girl, slid from it, book and all, on to the soft, furry rug.

"What a tease you are, Gertie!" exclaimed the young lady, as she picked herself up with a yawn. "It won't take me ten minutes to get ready, and I wanted to finish my novel. I've just reached the part when the hero is flung over a cliff by his rival. I must know whether he is killed or not."

"I can tell you without having read the book," said Gertie. "He turns up safe and sound in the third volume; they always do; the hero of a three-volume novel has more lives than a cat. Fire cannot destroy or water drown him. He emerges unscathed from each thrilling adventure. Now, are you going?"

"Yes," rather crossly; "but Lionel ought to wait my pleasure. I don't see why I should study his."

"My dear child, first impressions go a long way, and I am so anxious that Lion should regard you from a favourable point of view. Don't begin by giving him an idea that you are dilatory and unpunctual."

"First impressions," repeated Hilda. "We have been staying beneath the same roof nearly a fortnight, now. We ought to have gained some insight into each other's character by this time. Yet your cousin has failed to make the most of his opportunities, Gertie. My charms are wasted upon him. I don't believe he cares two straws for me."

The girl's voice had an impatient inflection, her large light blue eyes flashed with a kind of steely anger and resentment.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed her friend. "I am certain that Lion approves of you, Hilda. You just suit his fastidious taste and requirements in a woman. Only he is very undemonstrative, slow to declare himself, but in the long run those men are most to be relied upon. A little tact on your part, dear, and he will come to the point."

"I wish he'd be sharp about it," said Hilda pertly turning to quit the room. Despite her assumed indifference, she had a very keen desire to meet with Lionel Carew's approval, to defer to his wishes and opinions, with a view to becoming his wife later on. Then, when the lover had become the husband, the need for self-repression would be at an end, reflected this astute young lady. Her own will and pleasure, her real nature, might be freely asserted without any disastrous consequences.

Several months had elapsed since the gale which had nearly resulted in the loss of the *Seagull* with all hands, and the burning of Bruce Lennox's cottage on the cliff. Spring

had come again, and with it the commencement of the London season.

Lionel Carew was staying with his cousin, Gertrude Alleyn and her husband during a change of apartments, which would otherwise have occasioned him some discomfort. He had accepted Gertie's pressing invitation to take up his temporary abode in her handsome Belgravian residence, little dreaming of the plot which two female conspirators were maturing against his bachelor freedom, and presumably unattached affections.

Gertrude Alleyn, Lionel's cousin, had married a fashionable physician, old enough to be her father, at the age of nineteen. Yet the husband and wife were on the most amicable terms. Dr. Alleyn, a very wealthy man, who stood well for a title as the reward of his scientific reputation almost worshipped his pretty young wife, and deferred to her wishes in every respect. She, who had married him for money and an assured position in society, having obtained her heart's desire, treated him not unkindly in return. She even entertained a certain mild affection for her husband, and studied his likings—when they were not in direct opposition to her own. Three charming little girls were the result of this union, which in every sense of the word had turned out well.

Gertrude Alleyn was one of those

"Happy souls, who all the way  
To Heaven enjoy a summer's day."

As a child she had been petted and caressed—a cherished darling.

As a girl at school Gertie was always popular.

Lovers had not been wanting when she came out to strew her path with fresh roses and delights.

Now, as the wife of a wealthy man, who adored her, the mistress of a splendid house, her star was still in the ascendant.

Yet she accepted these blessings, as happy and favoured people generally do, very much as a matter of course.

Unshadowed prosperity had rendered Gertie Alleyn somewhat selfish and imperious, apt to ignore or over-ride the claims of others, indignant if they crossed or ventured to dispute her good will and pleasure in the slightest degree.

In this case the offender seldom met with justice, Gertie's quick temper and exaggerated sense of her own importance standing between her and a fair summing-up.

Like many other young wives, happily married, Mrs. Alleyn was somewhat addicted to matchmaking.

She liked to throw people whom she considered suitable together, and exert herself to fan the flame of love between them, until it was strong enough for Hyman to light his torch at.

Just at present she was very much interested in bringing about an engagement between her cousin, Lionel Carew, and Hilda Barton, a school-friend with whom she had always been on the most affectionate terms.

That Lionel should have remained a bachelor so long was a serious trouble to Gertrude Alleyn.

She resolved to take him in hand, and, if possible, marry him to Hilda Barton.

To advance this object she had invited both young people to stay with her at the same time, taking care that they should constantly be thrown into each other's society.

Hilda Barton belonged to a good family.

Moreover, when she came of age she would inherit a small fortune.

These advantages, combined with a pretty face and attractive manner, rendered her a very desirable *flâncée* from Gertie Alleyn's point of view.

She had confided her design upon Lionel to Hilda, and the girl had been quite ready to acquiesce in this matrimonial scheme, and do her utmost to promote it.

She certainly liked the young Baronet as

much as it was in her nature to care for any human being, save herself.

Yet she would gladly have married him or any other man capable of giving her the title and the position she coveted.

Hilda Barton's cold, calculating disposition glanced forth in her light blue eyes, and revealed itself in the curves of her thin, well-shaped lips.

She was absolutely devoid of any generous or unselfish instincts.

Granted the need and the occasion, she could have displayed systematic cruelty, passionless anger, towards the object of hatred.

No kindly impulse had ever stirred the depths of her torpid nature.

Yet she knew well how to dissemble, to assume the virtues she did not possess.

Her graceful animated manner and low-toned musical voice generally evoked admiration.

The men whose good opinion she sought to gain—Hilda Barton never troubled herself to conciliate the women—could not tell how differently that voice sounded when addressing an inferior, how hard and abrupt her manner grew when in the home circle, where it was unnecessary to pose for effect.

She had sufficient tact to prevent her real nature from coming to the surface, and spoiling her matrimonial chances. She simulated the warmth she never felt, and this was the girl who had resolved in her own mind to become Lady Carew.

The baronet had not the faintest idea of her ambitious designs upon himself. He thought Hilda Barton a pleasant, agreeable girl, always ready to sing to him or ride with him, a lively, well-informed companion; but it had never once occurred to him to regard her in the light of his future wife.

She might have possessed more attraction for him had Elaine Verschoyle never crossed his path, only to vanish again directly, leaving him full of unrealised passionate yearnings. As it was, his search for Elaine, still prosecuted with vigour, still unsuccessful, occupied his thoughts too exclusively for them to stray in any other direction.

How well he loved this girl, his aunt's poor companion, can be inferred from his fidelity to her memory, and the dogged perseverance with which he sought to ascertain her present whereabouts.

Sooner or later, he told himself with the assurance born of youth and hope, she must be found, and then?

On his way downstairs to join Hilda Barton in the drawing room, Lionel Carew encountered Dot Alleyn, a golden-haired mite with dancing brown eyes, and teeth like tiny pearls, in the corridor.

He caught her up in his strong arms and tossed her high above his head, to Dot's great delight. In the height of their glee a voice from the school-room reached their ears.

"Dot; where are you?"

Dot, very much dishevelled, her cheeks flushed, her eyes glowing, scrambled down with a laugh.

"That's Miss Verschoyle calling," she said. "She's going to take us into the park for a walk. We always go there after lessons."

"Miss who?" asked Lionel.

"Miss Verschoyle, our new governess," explained Dot. "She only came the day before yesterday, and she's ever so nice. I like her better than—"

At this moment the door at the far end of the corridor opened, and a tall, slim girl emerged from the schoolroom in search of Dot, a girl with sunny brown hair, cut in a natural wavy crop, a pale, sweet, sensitive face, and large shadow-haunted hazel eyes.

As his eyes rested eagerly upon her, Lionel Carew strode suddenly forward with a suppressed cry of astonishment and delight.

"Elaine, Miss Verschoyle!" he exclaimed.

"Thank Heaven we have met at last!"

His delight at the meeting was not reflected on her face, however. She grew ghastly pale;

ignoring his outstretched hand, she made a movement as if to re-enter the schoolroom.

"Sir Lionel Carew," she faltered. "Oh! I did not expect to meet you here."

"You would have preferred avoiding me altogether, I suppose," he said reproachfully, yet with an under current of subtle joy at having found her. "You have been very cruel to me, Elaine."

"Hush!" she replied, imploringly, with a glance at the three wondering curious child-faces beside her. "I don't understand you, Sir Lionel."

"You little people go upstairs to nurse, and tell her to put your things on," said the Baronet, addressing his juvenile cousins. "Miss Verschoyle is going to take you out presently."

As they disappeared Elaine Verschoyle turned to him with a passionate appealing gesture.

"Sir Lionel," she began, nervously, "it is quite true that I bitterly regret this encounter. I had hoped, nay, I had even prayed, that you and I might never meet again. As it is, I can only implore you not to revert to the subject of our last conversation, or to betray any previous knowledge of me. You were the cause of my leaving Miss Sutton, and enduring great anxiety before I succeeded in obtaining another engagement. I appeal to your sense of honour, your generosity, not to deprive me for the second time of a home by urging upon me a suit which I can never accept, which, if known, would arouse the disapproval of my employers."

"But, Elaine, only one word," urged the young man, detaining her. "Was that unfortunate proposal of mine the cause of your summary dismissal?"

"Yes," she replied, with a burning blush. "Miss Sutton thought I was to blame. She made me the scapegoat for your sins. I don't wish to reproach you," she added, hurriedly; "you are not responsible for her unjust act, and my subsequent suffering. Only leave me alone and unnoticed now. Do not attempt to renew that proposal which cost me so dear. Otherwise I shall think you are indeed persecuting me."

"Persecuting you!" he repeated bitterly. "Oh, Elaine, the cruelty is on your side—not mine! All these months I have been searching for you, straining every nerve to find you, that I might repair the harm done, and now that we have met you refuse to look at me, to listen to me! What have I done that you should regard me with such aversion?"

"Nothing," she replied with a sob, "yet I have only the one answer for you. I shall never have any other."

"I love you a thousand times more than of old," he continued, passionately. "I am willing, eager, to make you my wife without delay. Why should you hesitate or refuse to accept love as sincere, as honourable as mine?"

"I cannot," she moaned, and her eyes had the expression of some hunted creature at bay. "I shall never marry. If you really love me, you will go away at my request, and leave me in peace."

"Surely," he urged, "it cannot be that you fear the world's opinion of such a marriage too deeply to venture upon it?"

"No," she replied steadily. "My refusal of your offer, Sir Lionel, is not prompted by such a cowardly dread. I should never allow the world's opinion to stand between me and happiness, but there are more potent reasons. Once for all, I refuse to become your wife. I ask you as a favour, in future, when you visit at this house to treat me as a governess should be treated, to ignore our past acquaintance entirely."

This firm negative, cutting off all hope of future relenting, gave rise to a feeling of fierce despair in Lionel Carew's breast.

Until now he had not realised how absolutely indispensable she was to his happiness, how black and bare and desolate life would seem without her.

"Your request shall be granted," he said, hoarsely. "You will never have to accuse me of unmanly persecution, Elaine. My entreaties are at an end. Inadvertently, perhaps, you have wrecked my life; that, since you care nothing for me, however, is a matter of little moment."

"Oh! forgive me!" she murmured, with averted face. "I am so wretched myself you can afford to do that. Forget me and forgive me—it is all I ask."

"I can never forget you," he said. "Elaine, am I never to know the meaning of this persistent refusal? Is it because you have no love to give me in return for my own?"

Her lips quivered, she shrank a little farther away from the handsome, eager face, so close to her own.

"Be merciful!" she cried. "Do not press me any further. I tell you we can never be more to each other than we are at present, and with this statement you must be content. If I have disturbed your happiness, your peace of mind, I am bitterly sorry. Heaven knows I did not do it intentionally!"

A little gleam of hope flashed across Lionel Carew's mind. Her attitude was hardly that of a woman who disliked, or felt indifferent to him.

"Elaine, I would wait so patiently," he pleaded, "in the hope of one day gaining your love. Darling, am I presumptuous in thinking that your happiness as well as my own may be involved in our union or separation?"

"There is no happiness for me!" she exclaimed, brokenly. "From childhood upwards my life has been one long wretchedness. I am not twenty yet, and I have ceased to fear death. One must have gone through a great deal of misery to arrive at such pass. I regard death as my best, nay, my only friend. And now, Sir Lionel, goodbye; remember your promise."

She held out a little trembling hand as she spoke; he clasped it mechanically and raised it to his lips.

A slight sound caused him to look up. Hilda Barton, in a riding habit which seemed moulded to her exquisite form, the fit was so perfect, and carrying a small silver-mounted whip in her hand, was in the act of descending the staircase.

Elaine Verschoyle vanished within the schoolroom, leaving him alone.

Uncertain as to how much Hilda had seen and heard, Lionel Carew went boldly forward to meet her, veiling his annoyance and vexation beneath a smile. He felt extremely anxious and desirous of conciliating her on Elaine's account.

"I hope I have not kept you waiting, Miss Barton," he said, pleasantly. "That young tyrant, Dot, took possession of me just now, and insisted on my paying a visit to the schoolroom."

"Where, I daresay, you found plenty to amuse you," replied Hilda Barton, graciously. Yet there was a steely gleam in her light blue eyes, a cruel look about her firmly-compressed lips which augured ill for the governess.

"The horses are at the door, I think," she continued, gathering the folds of her riding-habit gracefully around her.

"Oh, no, you have not kept me waiting, Sir Lionel; if you had I could pardon the want of punctuality, since it is a virtue in which I am sadly lacking myself."

She laughed and talked even more than usual during their ride. Lionel Carew, noting her animation and unabated interest in his remarks, came to the conclusion that she had failed to notice him in the act of kissing Elaine Verschoyle's hand.

Had she done so she would display disapproval or resentment, he reflected, little versed as he was in a woman's histrionic powers, which enable her so skilfully to conceal her true feelings; and he felt relieved in consequence of this mistaken opinion.

Her ride over, Hilda Barton entered her

friend's dressing-room, without waiting to change her habit first.

"Gertie," she began, abruptly, "I have made an interesting discovery. Sir Lionel is carrying on a vigorous flirtation with the new governess. I can hardly expect to compete successfully against such a rival."

With a cold passionless anger, peculiar to her nature, Hilda Barton related the few words she had overheard, and the scene she had witnessed between Lionel Carew and Elaine Verschoyle in the corridor. Gertie Alleyn listened with incredulous indignation.

"But, my dear child," she exclaimed, "Miss Verschoyle only arrived the day before yesterday, and I had such unimpeachable references with her. How can they have scraped acquaintance already?"

"Possibly their acquaintance is of less recent date than you imagine," said Hilda, sullenly. "I inferred as much from what little I heard. I tell you, I saw him kiss her hand. I can understand now his comparative indifference towards myself."

"This must be stopped at once," replied Mrs. Alleyn, her small dark face flushing angrily. "My plans for you and Lionel are not to be set aside and frustrated by a designing governess, Hilda. I shall pay Miss Verschoyle a month's wages in lieu of notice and dismiss her to day."

This pitiless purpose was effected at the time when Lionel Carew was usually absent at his club. Returning to his cousin's house a little earlier than he had previously done, he was surprised to see a cab, piled with luggage, standing at the door; his surprise changed to consternation as Elaine Verschoyle came out, and entered the cab.

"What does this mean?" he demanded authoritatively, with one foot on the step.

She regarded him with a glance, devoid of all resentment, yet infinitely touching in its quiet hopeless despair.

"It means, Sir Lionel," she replied, "that for the second time you have been instrumental in depriving me of home and livelihood."

#### CHAPTER IV.

Elaine Verschoyle could ask any questions or make any protest against her sudden departure the cab containing Elaine Verschoyle drove rapidly away.

He had ascertained its number, however, and he could easily recognise the driver.

This time her destination could not be concealed from him. Lionel Carew decided not to follow the cab, lest such an act on his part should have a wrong construction placed upon it by Elaine. She had already cause enough to think bitterly of him, he reflected sadly. With the best possible intentions, loving her passionately, he had thus far brought nothing but sorrow and misfortune upon her.

"For the second time you have deprived me of home and livelihood." Surely those sad despairing words would haunt him by night and day, until he discovered some mode of atonement for the harm done. But this must needs prove very difficult since Elaine had twice refused to become his wife, and the very fact of his having made love to her had incurred the displeasure of her employers in two instances.

How could he, a single man, offer assistance of any kind to a girl who was not even engaged to him? Such an offer would, by one so proud and high-spirited as Elaine, be considered little short of insult, no matter how badly—thanks to him—she might stand in need of aid. It was a case which hardly admitted of atonement or compensation.

In a state of angry rebellion against such a combination of unfavourable circumstances, Lionel Carew went in search of his cousin.

He found her alone in the drawing-room. "Gertie," he began, abruptly, "have you dismissed your governess, Miss Verschoyle in consequence of any representations on the

part of Miss Barton? If so, you have been guilty of great injustice!"

Little Mrs. Alleyn raised her eyebrows in well-simulated surprise. She was very much annoyed that Lionel should have witnessed Elaine's departure, but she had far too much tact to implicate Hilda Barton in the matter, and thus give rise to a prejudice against her in the Baronet's mind.

"My dear Lion, what a strange question!" she said, laughingly. "Why, at this moment, you look almost as fierce as your namesake. Hilda, poor child, has nothing to do with my domestic arrangements. Miss Verschoyle failed to satisfy my requirements in a governess, and I found it necessary to dismiss her. I intend to engage a much older person in her stead."

"She had scarcely been here long enough for you to form a fair estimate of her abilities," rejoined Lionel Carew, in a tone of mingled anger and contempt. "Don't trouble yourself to prevaricate, Gertie. You were prevailed upon to dismiss her by reason of Hilda Barton's statement. She witnessed a scene between us in the corridor this morning, and doubtless placed a wrong construction upon it."

His peremptory manner was fast arousing Gertie Alleyn's temper, especially as her matrimonial projects seemed in danger of failing through.

"Really, Lionel!" she retorted, her dark eyes flashing. "Your tone is most uncalled for. I have a right to order my own household as I please. I should not think of retaining a governess capable of carrying on such a flagrant flirtation with a gentleman staying in the house. I can only say that I have been very much deceived in Miss Verschoyle."

He could but notice, in the midst of his angry sorrow, how all the blame was reserved for the woman, none of it being directed against the man.

"Will you be kind enough," he asked, with sarcastic politeness, "to repeat Miss Barton's allegation to me, that I may know precisely what I and Miss Verschoyle are accused of?"

"Hilda heard you talking sentimental nonsense to that girl in the corridor," replied Gertie Alleyn sharply. "She saw you actually kiss her hand, and, very properly, she made me aware of this scene. Really, Lionel, I gave you credit for better taste. I did not think you would condescend to flirt with a governess!"

"You were quite right, belle cousin, in your opinion of me," he said, calmly. "I merited it, I was not flirting with the governess. On the contrary, I was renewing an offer of marriage made to Miss Verschoyle on a previous occasion, asking her to become my wife."

It was Gertie Alleyn's turn to look astonished now.

"Your wife!" she exclaimed. "Then you have met before?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In Westmoreland." A sudden light broke upon the little lady's perplexity.

"Do you mean to say, Lion," she continued, "that Miss Verschoyle is the girl Aunt Deborah alluded to in her letter to me some months ago? She said she had dismissed her companion because she had detected you in the act of making love to her, and she intended to dispense with one altogether in future. Is it possible that this companion and Miss Verschoyle are identical?"

"They are," said Lionel Carew, steadily. "And—and you have been mad enough to propose to her!" exclaimed Gertie Alleyn, furiously. "To think that you should have met again beneath my roof. Of course she has accepted you. An adventuress would not allow such a golden chance to slip through her fingers."

"I regret to say that Miss Verschoyle declined absolutely to become my wife. Alude to her again in terms similar to those you

have just used, Gertie, and our friendship will be at an end for ever!"

"She refused you?" said Gertie Alleyn, in a calmer tone, drawing an involuntary breath of relief. "What induced her to do that, pray?"

"I cannot tell," replied Lionel Carew. "She would vonchafe no reason for the refusal, yet it was final and decisive. Gertie, I wish to Heaven I could interest you on her behalf. She is so lonely, so friendless, poor child, while I, with every desire to promote her welfare, have brought only sorrow and loss upon her, through my love, which she steadily refuses to accept. A rash, premature declaration of it has, in two instances, deprived her of home and employment. As the case stands, I am powerless. I cannot make atonement; she has herself rendered this impossible by refusing to accept me as her husband. Will you act a kindly part towards her, and take her back into your household, now that I have assured you how innocent she is of all blame? The fault, if any, rests with me. I ask this of you as a personal favour."

In making this eloquent appeal he had given Gertie Alleyn credit for good qualities, womanly sympathies, which she did not possess. Incensed as she was against Elaine Verschoyle for inadvertently spilling all her plans, she was the last person on earth likely to extend a helping hand to the girl.

"I am very sorry, Lion," she said, stiffly, "but I cannot accede to your request. On principle I must refrain from doing anything calculated to bring about such an extremely undesirable match. Later on when you have conquered this infatuation for a low-born girl—I can call it nothing else—you will thank me for refusing to countenance it. Miss Verschoyle will never enter my house again under any circumstances!"

"You seem to ignore the fact that she has refused to marry me, and thus purged her contempt!" said Lionel Carew, striving to repress his anger.

"A mere *ruse* to draw you on. She would have kept out of your way had she really objected to such a union!" said Gertie Alleyn pitilessly. "Lion, do be reasonable. Put this girl out of your mind altogether. I thought, that is I hoped, you were learning to care for Hilda Barton."

"Hilda Barton!" he repeated in a tone of angry amazement that effectively scuttled her last hopes of their ever becoming engaged. "So that is why you have thrown us together so much off late? You wanted to find a husband for your friend? Look here, Gertie, since plain speaking is the order of the day, I tell you that your trouble has been wasted. I shall never care for any girl but Elaine Verschoyle. I wouldn't marry Hilda Barton if she were the only woman in the world, especially after the mischief she has made, and the trouble she has brought on Elaine! I thought you would have responded to my appeal. As it is, the sooner I release you of my presence the better!"

He flung himself out of the room as he spoke, and Gertie Alleyn, angry, disappointed, completely frustrated for once, and unable to assert her strong will in order to set matters right, indulged in the feminine luxury of a "good cry."

Meanwhile, Elaine Verschoyle, sick at heart, bewildered by the suddenness of this fresh misfortune, which had deprived her of a temporary home, was in quest of some cheap lodgings, where she could stay until she procured a fresh engagement.

Her available cash amounted to little more than ten pounds, so it behoved her to be very careful. She had no friends or relations with whom she could seek shelter. Left an orphan at a very early age, brought up among strangers, Elaine was, in every sense of the word, one by herself. The peculiar circumstances which had led to her dismissal caused her to shrink from informing the lady who had supplied her with a reference of her painful position, lest she should think ill of her. It seemed

to the unhappy girl that she was being hemmed in on all sides by destiny—hunted down.

Elaine's life and sad premature experience had tended to produce great bitterness of spirit. Happiness of any kind was to her an unknown quality. Yet she had craved for it with such pitiful intensity. She had seen it around her in the world, beautifying the lives of others, but it had never fallen to her share.

Tender, loving, sensitive by nature, she had met with little beyond chill indifference or active unkindness in her lonely struggle with the world.

By slow degrees disappointment and adversity had crushed out each young, warm, throbbing hope; her belief in human kindness and sympathy had resulted in cruel disillusion. Her surroundings had always been prosaic, commonplace, ungenial, supplying no vent for her exuberant, rich vitality. Elaine could not endure a grey, desolate, barren life with mechanical fortitude. Her imaginative, gifted, fervid temperament, so capable of appreciating better things, craved instinctively for happiness and love; failing to find them it drooped and languished.

Yet love had come, even to her, at length, with the potentialities of happiness, rich, full, passionate, beyond the power of words to express, and she, oh! misery had been compelled to thrust the precious gift away from her.

It had come only to accentuate her wretchedness by the torturing knowledge of what might have been, come too late in the ordinal order of things, for her to avail herself of it.

She had lost her employment through Lionel Carew's impulsive admission of love, his entreaty that she would become his wife, and give him the right to shield her from all adversity; she was thrown upon the world again, yet no angry or resentful feeling was associated with him in her mind.

She knew that he had acted in all good faith, that he was not to be blamed for the disastrous result.

Strange as it may sound, a tender gratitude, a vague sweet joy blended with her wretchedness.

Despite her poverty Elaine felt rich in the knowledge that one man at least loved her, not wisely, but too well.

"I would not be without the knowledge of his love, dear as it has cost me," she murmured. "It is all I shall have to strengthen me in the grey desolate years yet to come, my one beautiful memory shining like a star in life's dark sky."

She found a lodgings at last, after many inquiries in the neighbourhood of Great Windmill-street.

It was not by any means a choice locality; the dingy houses were chiefly tenanted by third-rate professionals, seedy foreigners, French laundrymen, and others whose walks in life seldom led to their keeping a carriage. Elaine's scanty means and her yet scantier knowledge of town prevented her from seeking a more desirable quarter.

Having paid a week's rent in advance, in lieu of reference, she was free to take possession of the one shabbily-furnished room she had engaged. On the following day she resumed the effort to obtain employment, in itself sufficient to break the stoniest heart.

Frequent refusals, wearisome waiting, suspense ending only in disappointment, Elaine endured it all with a wistful wonder, now and then, as to why she had been born into a world where she appeared to be so little needed.

Strive as she would she could not obtain an engagement of any kind, and, as her scanty means became exhausted, she grew prouder, more reserved, shrinking alike from the pity or the contempt of strangers.

She retired within herself, as it were, resolved to continue the struggle in silence to the bitter end.

Lionel Carew's passionately worded letter, pleading for an interview, for permission to visit her, for pardon in respect to the injury sustained through him, received a firm, decisive reply.

She neither could nor would meet him again, she said, or consent to a correspondence being carried on between them. From henceforth he must respect her wishes, and make no attempt to approach her.

An actress occupied the room on the other side of the landing, a pretty girl with fair, much-brizzled hair and grey eyes. Elaine often heard Jenny Vivian singing selections from the last new opera. She seemed a bright, merry creature, whom nothing could depress.

Sometimes, when they chanced to meet on the stairs, Jenny Vivian had addressed a remark to Elaine, but the latter had not sought to improve the acquaintance.

She had no prejudice against Jenny's profession; it was her poverty, the dull misery gnawing at her heart, that rendered her so distant and reserved in manner.

There came a day at length when black despair stared Elaine in the face. She had changed her last shilling, and employment seemed as far off as ever.

Returning from a fruitless journey to a northern suburb, where she had found the situation advertised already filled, the girl's courage gave way as she entered her poor room.

She was tired, having walked the whole distance, and faint from lack of food. Resting her head on the table she burst into a passion of weeping, hysterical sobs which she could not suppress rising to her lips.

She started violently as a hand was laid upon her shoulder. Glancing up she beheld Jenny Vivian, her grey eyes full of compassion.

"Don't you be angry with me for taking your castle by storm, Miss Verschoyle," said the actress, briskly; "there was no other way of getting at you. Now be friendly for once, there's a dear, and come into my room and have tea. You're tired after your long walk, and you've got a bad fit of the blues. A chat and a cup of tea will do you no end of good."

Jenny stooped down and kissed her as she spoke with the impulsive familiarity of her class, and Elaine did not resent the act. The unexpected human sympathy and contact seemed precious at that moment, and she was too weary to struggle any longer to keep up appearances.

She permitted Jenny to lead her into the room on the other side of the landing, and instal her in a very old but comfortable easy-chair.

A little round table was set out in readiness for tea.

Jenny had provided ham, marmalade, and watercress in addition to bread-and-butter.

Elaine thought she had never enjoyed a meal so much; she even found herself laughing at some of Jenny's nonsense over tea was over.

"You look happy better already," remarked that young lady, approvingly. "You're too much alone, that's what it is; and you've been worrying yourself because you can't meet with an engagement.

In return for the kindness experienced, Elaine confided some of her troubles to Jenny Vivian.

"Now, my dear," said the little actress, after listening attentively, "I've a proposal to make. You've got a musical voice, a good figure, and a lovely face. Why don't you go upon the stage?"

#### CHAPTER V.

ELAINE opened her eyes very wide as Jenny Vivian made this startling suggestion.

"I—go on the stage?" she repeated, in all astonishment. "Why, I know nothing of stage requirements. I have only been inside a theatre three times. Besides, I should not have courage to face an audience."

Jenny Vivian laughed.

"You'd soon get over your attack of stage fright," she said; "and you could go on in a crowd until you got accustomed to facing the footlights and the audience. No manager would give you speaking parts to commence with. If I could obtain a small engagement for you, would you accept it? I am willing to introduce you to a manager I know, a nice fellow, who would very likely give you a start."

Elaine hesitated.

The proposal was so strange, so unexpected. If she accepted it, she would enter upon a new phase of existence altogether. Yet she felt very grateful to Jenny Vivian for taking so much interest in her, and her present existence had little to recommend it.

A pure-minded, high-principled girl, Elaine Verschoyle was yet singularly devoid of all narrow prejudice.

It was not Jenny's profession she objected to; a doubt as to her own fitness for it, a fear lest disappointment or failure should await her in this quarter, as it had done in every other, caused her to hesitate.

"Of course, there's no accounting for taste," continued Jenny Vivian, as she helped her guest to a liberal spoonful of preserves. "You may not like the idea of it, but give me the stage in preference to teaching other people's spoiled brats, or acting as companion to a disagreeable old woman, with a lap-dog and a parrot. I should call that slavery of the worst kind. You may have to work hard on the stage, but you keep your freedom. I suppose, now, you wouldn't like to become a professional?"

"Oh, it's not that," said Elaine, with a sad little smile. "I've plenty of faults, but false pride is not among them. I am so poor, so destitute, in fact, I would gladly accept honest work of any kind, on or off the stage. The only question is, am I capable of earning a living on the boards? It requires talent."

"You've got it, my dear, in an undeveloped condition," interposed Jenny Vivian, briskly. "The credit of having discovered a dramatic star will yet be mine. I ain't jealous, not a bit. I know my own limit by this time. I shall never get beyond light comedy parts, and they suit me very well, but you may attempt something higher. Well, is it settled? Are you going with me to-morrow to see old Maynooth?"

"Yes," said Elaine; "and I thank you, oh, so much, for giving me the chance. I can't understand," she continued, "why you should have displayed so much kindness towards a perfect stranger. It is quite a new experience, so far as I am concerned."

"Lor', my dear, I've done nothing worth mention!" exclaimed the actress, as she began to clear the table. "It's only right that we should help one another in this worrying world, not that I find much fault with it, though. It's jolly enough for those who can take the ups with the downs, and, providing the present is agreeable, never trouble their heads about the future; that's my sort; but we're not all constituted alike."

"No, we're not," said Elaine, thoughtfully.

"I knew as soon as I saw you," continued Jenny, "that you were a lady, different to the rest of us about here, and each time you came home looking so tired and disappointed I felt awfully sorry for you. It's cruel work studying the papers in search of employment. I didn't like to force my sympathy upon you, since you were so reserved, but when I heard you sobbing as if your heart would break this afternoon I decided to take the bull by the horns and come in."

"I am very glad you did," said Elaine, gratefully, with a comprehensive glance around Jenny Vivian's room.

It was better unimpassioned than her own, but in a chaotic condition. Order and neatness were not included in Jenny's list of virtues. Her hats, and bonnets, and gowns had overflowed the small wardrobe, and occupied most of the chairs as well. It would have appeared

to have rained slippers and gloves, and neck-ribbons, these small articles with many others being freely distributed about the room. Photos of theatrical celebrities adorned the mantelpiece, a splendid bouquet, a gift from one of Jenny's admirers, had been placed in a glass vase without any water. Fancy boxes of sweetmeats, yellow-backed novels, and illustrated periodicals, were scattered around promiscuously. Altogether, it was a frivolous room, denoting the character of its occupant.

"Time for me to start," said Jenny, glancing at an absurd little clock on the mantelpiece, which had as its pendulum a boy and girl playing seesaw. "Now, don't you get dull while I am away, dear. I'm certain there's good luck in store for you tomorrow."

Elaine gave the drooping flowers some water, and reduced her new friend's room to something approaching order, services for which Jenny thanked her effusively. Then, when the actress went out, she returned to her own room to think over the possible change in store for her should the manager Jenny relied upon consent to engage her.

"Why should I entertain any objection to earning my own living upon the stage?" she reflected. "I am alone in the world. No one has either the right or the desire to criticise my choice of a profession, and I am not in any way compelled to part with my self-respect. I can retain that undiminished. Better tread the boards than die of slow starvation. Gentle employment, so-called, has proved a very bitter experience to me. It has not once brought me in contact with warm hearts or generous natures. Superficial toleration, a dreary round of uninteresting duties—I have little to regret in leaving these behind. My new associates will at least regard me as an equal, my employment will admit of variety. Oh! I wonder if he will engage me? Perhaps—but I dare not hope. I have so often been disappointed."

Jenny Vivian was as good as her word on the following day. She introduced Elaine to the manager of a theatre where she had, until recently, been fulfilling an engagement herself.

They were running a grand spectacular drama at the "Comus," and one which required an immense number of "supers" to represent well-dressed ladies and gentlemen.

Richard Maynooth, the manager, a big, burly man, with a long beard and an eccentric ulster, regarded Elaine with keen, critical eyes, rapidly summing up all her points. He noted her lovely face and graceful figure, while her full, sweet, musical voice and refined accents, tended to deepen the favourable impression produced.

"I'm, no experience of the stage whatever, but would like to meet with an opening," he remarked, after listening to Jenny Vivian's first statement of her friend's requirements. "You'll have to begin at the very bottom of the ladder, Miss Verschoyle. It depends upon your own abilities whether you ever get beyond that. Let me see, you'd have to come on in the drawing room scene in the second act with the rest. I can only offer you ten shillings a week to start with, but it would be a commencement."

Elaine promptly accepted this offer, and was told to appear at rehearsal on the following morning.

Their brief interview with the great man over, the two girls returned to their lodgings, Jenny Vivian in high spirits at the success which had attended their errand; Elaine half pleased, half fearful, as she contemplated her future prospects, and the changed life awaiting her.

What would Lionel Carew think or say should it ever come to his knowledge that she had gone upon the stage? Elaine wondered. Would he seek her out, and venture upon useless remonstrance or entreaty?

She hoped not; she even strove to banish

the young baronet's image from her heart, but in vain.

Thoughts of him crowded her life, mingling with each plan and prospect, deepening the intense regretful sadness which always overshadowed her.

Jenny Vivian devoted all her spare time that day to coaching her friend in stage requirements, stage terms, the art of "making-up," the rules to be observed behind the scenes, the Shibboleth of the boards, that she might appear less uninitiated, and Elaine proved an apt pupil.

Her quick sympathies, deep affections, and fervent imagination, her responsive, impressionable nature, were all in favour of her new vocation, which must needs absorb her mind, and prevent her from brooding over past troubles.

Elaine laughed and shook her head, though, as Jenny prophesied great things for her.

"I shall do my best," she said, "but I dare not anticipate the result. I, who have served an apprenticeship to disappointment."

"Hope's a cheap luxury, anyhow," replied Jenny, striking an attitude.

"No, a very dear one," dissented Elaine, "when you are called upon to pay the high price of disappointment. I have ceased to expect great things from life. To earn my living is all that I aspire to."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Jenny, "just wait till you're in receipt of a big salary, you'll find there's plenty of enjoyment to be extracted from life then!"

Elaine only smiled, making no attempt to dispute this assertion. She could not explain the true state of affairs to such a volatile being as Jenny Vivian, but it was a far deeper sorrow than poverty which had sapped the foundations of her happiness so early in life, and one less easily removed.

Her longing for something human and responsive had at length been gratified. Jenny was not exactly the friend she would have chosen, perhaps, had the right of selection been afforded her, yet she was very grateful for the sympathy and aid Jenny had brought to bear upon her sad, lonely existence.

Elaine's *début* upon the stage was a very modest affair. She soon acquired the art of entering a stage drawing room gracefully, of sitting down or walking about with well-bred ease. Nothing further was required of her at first. Yet she made a careful study of stage exigencies at home; she denied herself of all but bare necessities in order to be present at *matinées* in which some famous actress was to take the leading part.

From her seat in gallery or pit Elaine noted each subtle inflection of voice and gesture, each fine shade of acting which went to make up the *tout ensemble*, the finished, exquisitely delineated character.

Her new profession was taking a firm hold of her; she began to love it for itself alone, to devote all her energies to the task of making some headway in it. In order to eke out her small salary Elaine gave lessons in French and music during the day to a few pupils she had obtained, and this contrived to meet her modest liabilities.

When the grand spectacular drama was taken off to make room for a new play, Richard Maynooth who had watched Elaine carefully, promoted her to a small part in the "curtain raiser" preceding the principal piece of the evening. It was a very small part indeed, but she would have several sentences to utter, and Elaine regarded it as a decided advance.

While still under the impression that she had done with hope and happiness for ever, a little germ of ambition was springing up in the girl's heart, a desire to excel in her profession which invested her with new life and vigour. She even began to study some world-renowned characters in secret, treating them with a daring originality of conception which would considerably have astonished the famous actresses with whom they were associated. Yet the exercise was good for her. It stirred up a

consciousness of latent force and talent, which afforded the girl a thrill of purest exultation. Was it possible that she had, as if by accident, stumbled upon her real vocation?

At least it took her out of herself, and prevented her from becoming morbid. The girls and women she met behind the scenes, too, were an improvement on Miss Sutton and Mrs. Alleyn. They were impulsive, warm-hearted, good-natured creatures, as a rule, capable of forming violent likes or dislikes, not too refined or highly educated, and slangy in diction; but they did not treat Elaine with the chill superciliousness, the heartless injustice and indifference which she had learned to associate with her aristocratic employers.

Just at first the other supernumeraries had been inclined to regard Elaine with suspicion, by reason of her being a lady, not that she ever asserted her right to the title.

That indefinable air, inseparable from gentle birth and good-breeding, had tended to distinguish her from the rest. But when they noted Elaine's pleasant unassuming manner, all jealousy or prejudice was laid aside. They recognized her evident desire to be on good terms with them, and responded to it.

Once the idea of writing to Sir Lionel Carew and assuring him that he had not been the means of injuring her prospects materially through that enforced dismissal, for which he was really responsible, had suggested itself to the girl. She longed unselfishly to set his mind at ease, to dispel the idea that he had done her grievous injury. Then reluctantly enough she relinquished the idea as infeasible.

It would seem like giving him a covert invitation to address her again, to renew the old importunities which could lead to nothing but fresh pain. In silence, Elaine sadly decided, lay her only safeguard.

Silence, however, on Lionel Carew's part did not imply forgetfulness. Elaine would have been astonished had she known how well acquainted the baronet was with her movements. He did not discover that she had actually gone upon the stage, though, until going one night with a party of friends to the "Comus" he recognized her in the afore-mentioned "curtain-raiser."

His indignation, his caste prejudices were fully aroused. This girl who had refused to become Lady Carew at his earnest solicitation had not scrupled to court publicity upon the stage. Pride and love alike were wounded by such a reflection. Disregarding Elaine's request, he sought an interview with her, and passionately upbraided her, while bringing all the eloquence he was capable of to bear upon his entreaty that she would renounce her recently-adopted profession, and become his wife.

But Elaine had maintained her old attitude towards him. Silent beneath his reproaches, she had declared herself incapable of responding to the subsequent appeal. For the first time Lionel Carew quitted her in fierce anger, thereby adding to the dull pain, the constant weight of anguish which oppressed her. If he could but have known how the girl's heart yearned and cried out for him, how gladly she would have fallen at his feet to implore favour and forgiveness, he might have pitied her, but in this world we seldom do know what is passing in the minds of those we love, or those who love us. Life is but a masked ball on a large scale. We conceal our real features, motives, &c., beneath the mask and domino of conventionality.

Those whose hands we clasp in the mazy dances of this *bal masqué* seldom know us as we really exist. The fit moment for revealing ourselves may never arrive. Some of us live and die without ever having removed the mask.

Business took Lionel Carew down to his estate in Shropshire soon after that stormy interview with the girl he loved. He was not very sorry to get away from town. The interests of the drowsy little borough he represented in Parliament required no vigilant

watching over, and burning questions of more general importance, in which he loved to participate, had been shelved for a time by the Irish difficulty.

In his spare time Lionel Carew devoted himself to literature. Some of his articles and one of his novels had attracted a little ephemeral attention. He was at work now upon a play destined, as its author fondly hoped, to gain a more lasting success. The quiet and seclusion he would enjoy at Carew Hall might induce fluent composition and fertile ideas to visit the budding dramatist.

Carew Hall was a long battlemented building covered with ivy, a square-built tower rising at either end. It stood in the centre of a large, richly-wooded park. A wide carriage-drive, bordered on either side by magnificent trees, led to the house. The great entrance hall, the diamond-paned casements, the ceilings of carved oak, the broad, shallow stairs with their carved balusters, the complete suits of armour ranged on low pedestals imparted a delicious sense of antiquity. Despite modern improvements the atmosphere was that of a bygone age.

On the day after his arrival Lionel Carew was in the library looking over some valuable leases and other papers submitted to him by the steward. It was a grand if somewhat gloomy-looking room, with its Gothic windows of stained glass, its ceiling and shelves of black carved oak, and massive furniture.

Jumping up suddenly Lionel Carew approached the shelves in search of a legal work he wished to refer to. Pulling out the wrong one he restored it its place with a jerk.

To his amazement, the solid wall, or what had appeared to be such, at the back of the bookcase slid noiselessly aside as the book came in sharp contact with it, revealing a small, square aperture containing a sealed document tied with tape.

A strange sense of awe upon him, Lionel Carew put out his hand and took the document from its hiding-place. Written upon it in large, bold caligraphy, which he recognised as that of his deceased uncle, Sir Eustace Carew, were the words, "My last will and testament."

## CHAPTER VI.

For some moments Lionel Carew stood there with the document in his hand, regarding it incredulously, one grimly unpleasant fact forcing itself upon his notice.

If this sealed roll of parchment, concealed until now behind the sliding-panel in the library and only discovered by accident, should indeed prove to be the deceased Baronet's last will and testament, then the will which had been duly proved and administered, and by virtue of which he, Lionel Carew, inherited, everything amounted to little more than waste paper, since it bore an earlier date.

What new disposition had Sir Eustace made of his property? And what motive had animated him in having a more recent will, of which even the family solicitor was not cognisant, drawn up? Having made it, why caused it to be thus carefully concealed?

The whole affair was shrouded in mystery. Uneasy, apprehensive, with a sense of the solid ground slipping from beneath his feet, of his inheritance vanishing into thin air, Lionel Carew carefully looked his most undesirable find in the drawer of the writing-table.

Then a man on horseback was despatched to the nearest station with a telegraphic message intended for Mr. Mellor the family solicitor, requesting him to come at once to Carew Hall on important business.

During the remainder of the day Lionel Carew roamed about the grounds and smoked a great deal more than was good for him, feeling too unsettled to devote himself to business connected with the estate, or resume his literary labours.

How could he possibly bring his thoughts to bear upon a play while taking such an active part in a thrilling life drama himself?

A vague presentiment of some disagreeable revelation in store depressed and irritated the young Baronet. Even the servants remarked his changed, preoccupied manner, and were at a loss to account for it.

Mr. Mellor arrived at noon on the following day. He was a stout, prosperous-looking elderly gentleman, with a bland mellow voice, regular, handsome features, and carefully kept, well-shaped white hands, the *ideal* of a safe custodian of family secrets and confidences, a thoroughly reliable, old-established family solicitor, who had managed the Carew's affairs for more than twenty years.

Luncheon over, Lionel Carew led the way to the library, and, producing the document found on the previous day, handed it to the lawyer, with a brief explanation as to the manner in which it had been brought to light.

Mr. Mellor at once declared that he had not been aware of the existence of any will beyond that which had given Lionel Carew the right to inherit his uncle's real and landed estate. The will just produced had been executed by Sir Eustace without his knowledge.

"The Baronet must have employed a strange solicitor to draw it up," he remarked. "I had no hand in it, Sir Lionel, otherwise I should have made inquiries for it at the time of his decease."

"I felt convinced that you knew nothing of it," replied Lionel Carew. "Why my uncle should have thought proper to make a subsequent will, I can't imagine. I had done nothing calculated to displease him. We were always on the best of terms."

"Your right to inherit may not be revoked in the second will," suggested Mr. Mellor. "It may contain some minor bequests, omitted in the previous one. Yet a codicil would have been sufficient in that case, and it is very strange that the Baronet should have kept it such a profound secret. You can't remember any allusion on his part to a will of later date?"

"I am positive he made no allusion of the kind," said Lionel Carew. "He was taken suddenly, you know, at the last—a paralytic seizure carried him off in a few days. I only returned from the Continent just in time to witness his death. He was speechless when I arrived."

"Well, the next thing is to open the will and ascertain its contents," rejoined the solicitor. "I should like several witnesses to be present on that occasion."

Two hours later the sealed document found in the secret recess was opened in the presence of Lionel Carew, the vicar, and the steward, by Mr. Mellor. Its contents were of a nature to amaze them all, revealing, as they did, a dual existence on the part of the dead man, whose power still made itself felt, of which they had had no previous knowledge.

The will, which was also a confession, alluded in lengthy terms to a secret marriage contracted by Sir Eustace some twenty-one years ago. Sir Eustace, whom every one had imagined to be vowed to perpetual celibacy, had, it appeared, soon after coming of age, fallen violently in love with and married a girl whose social status was vastly inferior to his own, without, however, revealing to her the title and position he enjoyed. She knew him only as Mr. Carew, a gentleman possessed of small independent means. He had been led to exercise this caution through fear of his friends' displeasure, should the *mésalliance*, of which he had been guilty, ever transpire.

The match had proved a most unhappy one, the young wife's violent temper and ceaseless jealousy effectually destroying all her husband's hopes of wedded bliss, while her defective education soon created a want of sympathy between them.

Sir Eustace had succeeded to the title and estate only six months when his wife left the pretty little home he had provided for her, after a more violent quarrel than usual, and returned

to her friends, poor people living in a distant country.

Three weeks later she gave birth to a child, and died; the child, as he was then informed, dying soon afterwards.

Sir Eustace was present at the double funeral; then, a weary, sad-hearted man, he returned to his lonely home, the disillusion he had undergone preventing him from ever making a second matrimonial venture.

Not long after that he resolved to adopt his nephew, Lionel Carew, and make the boy his heir.

The fact of his secret, unhappy marriage never transpired.

Then, the will went on to say, while lying on his death-bed, a prematurely aged man of forty-five, a letter had reached him from a woman, also dying, containing an admission of a cruel wrong, a shameful deception, practised upon him in years gone by.

This woman, his wife's godmother, to whom she had gone on leaving her home, had lied in declaring the child, a girl, born under her roof, to have died with its mother.

It lived and thrived, but in accordance with a promise made to the erring, unjustly prejudiced young wife, she had concealed this fact from Eustace Carew, and permitted him to think of the child as dead.

She had brought the little girl up herself, and had her well educated before sending her out into the world, under an assumed name, to earn her own living. A few years previous she, Rachael Vane, had discovered by chance the superior rank and great wealth of the girl's father; she had identified him with Sir Eustace Carew of Carew Hall.

Bitterly regretful, then, that she had withheld her from such advantages, she would fain have informed the Baronet of his daughter's existence, but fear kept her silent, a dread of his righteous anger when her deception should stand revealed prevented her from speaking.

Not until she lay upon her death bed had she gained the courage to write to Sir Eustace making a full confession, and imploring his forgiveness, while all necessary information respecting his daughter, whom he had never seen, was contained in the letter.

This missive had only reached the Baronet a few days previous to his own death, when it was too late for him to seek reunion and happiness with his child, but not too late, fortunately, to do her ample justice, to revoke the will already made.

With the exception of a few hundreds yearly, bequeathed to Lionel Carew, the estate and its princely income was left to Sir Eustace Carew's daughter, with strict injunctions to the executors to seek her out at once, and install her in the position that was rightfully hers, and from which she had been so long excluded.

The will bore date only two days previous to the Baronet's death. It had been witnessed by two of his oldest and most trustworthy servants.

In it the testator expressed his conviction that Lionel Carew, although a heavy loser by the new arrangement, would acquiesce in its perfect justice, and prove a true friend to his cousin, when she arrived to take possession.

It was a cruel blow to fall upon any man, a crushing, unexpected blow. Those present regarded Lionel Carew with sympathetic faces as Mr. Mellor ceased reading.

"The first thing to be done," he remarked, breaking the silence, "is to find Miss Carew. That should prove a very easy matter. I shall not contest her claim, since it is so evident. I shall resign in her favour, and I heartily wish that will had turned up before, that I had not occupied a false position for several years."

He spoke bitterly. It was no easy matter to resign such a splendid inheritance and the popularity, the prestige, it carried with it. At that moment Lionel Carew resented his uncle's marriage as a piece of cruel injustice directed

against himself, while he fairly hated this unknown girl who would shortly arrive to reign at Carew Hall in his stead.

Calmer moments might bring more dispassionate reflection with them. At present Lionel Carew felt very much inclined to resent the fate which had befallen him, and to regard his uncle's daughter as an interloper, even while he acknowledged her right to inherit.

Until now he had not realised how dear the grand ancestral home with which his earliest associations were connected had become to him, and what a wrench it would cost him to say good-bye to it for ever.

Mr. Mellor, whose sympathies were all ranged on Lionel's side, openly expressed his regret occasioned by the disclosure contained in the second will.

"These secret marriages are nearly always productive of mischief in the long run," remarked the solicitor. "Long experience has tended to confirm me in this impression, and too frequently the consequences fall on some individual who had no share in the rash, ill-advised transaction. Yours is a very hard case, Sir Lionel."

"I must endure my sudden reverse of fortune with what philosophy I can muster," replied Lionel Carew, forcing a smile. "I shall leave it to you, Mellor, to ascertain Miss Carew's present whereabouts, and to enlighten her with regard to her parentage and the good fortune awaiting her. I shall have quitted Carew Hall previous to her arrival. I have no desire to make my cousin's acquaintance."

"What I cannot understand," said the solicitor, "is the fact of the will being so carefully hidden. Who placed it in the recess behind the sliding panel? Not Sir Eustace; he was paralysed, unable to leave his bed at the time. Where are the old servants who witnessed the will?"

"They left Carew Hall soon after my uncle's death," said the baronet, "and returned to their native place, a village in Essex. Their evident desire to quit my service perplexed me somewhat, as they were both warmly attached to me. Suppose we have Simmons, the butler, in and ask him a few questions. He is a confidential servant, and he may be able to throw some light upon the events of the few days immediately preceding Sir Eustace's death."

Simmons a tall, stout, elderly man, respectability personified, declared that, two days previous to the baronet's decease, Mr. Mowbray, a local solicitor, had been closeted with him for several hours, the old servants, James Field and Mary Page, whose signatures were attached to the recently discovered will, being also present in the baronet's room during part of that time, an incident which had led to much surmise and conjecture in the servants' hall.

"Mowbray!" repeated Mr. Mellor, "wasn't he killed by a fall from his horse?"

"He was, sir," rejoined Simmons, "only the day after his having that long interview with Sir Eustace. And I remember that James Field seemed more glad than sorry when news of the fatal accident was brought to the Hall."

"That will do, Simmons," said Mr. Mellor. "You have told me all I wished to know," then, when the butler had left the library, he turned to Lionel Carew.

"The affair is no longer a mystery," he remarked. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, James Field and Mary Page are responsible for the hiding of the will in a place where it was most unlikely to be discovered. Upon the receipt of that letter, informing him of his daughter's existence, Sir Eustace resolved to make a new will. Fearful lest his decease should take place ere I could arrive from town to take his instructions, he sent for poor Mowbray instead, and had the will drawn up."

"James Field and Mary Page, who were probably aware of its contents, acted as witnesses. They were, as you said just now,

warmly attached to you, Sir Lionel, and this will, inimical to your interests, was not likely to meet with their approval. For some reason Sir Eustace preferred keeping the will in the house to intrusting it to Mowbray. The latter's sudden death on the next day, followed by the Baronet's demise, left only two persons aware of its existence, namely, Field and Page. They, instead of handing it over to you, or me, resolved to hide it, in order that you should inherit to your cousin's prejudice. They dared not destroy it outright, but they placed the will where it might have remained, for many years without being discovered, under the impression that, by so doing, they were serving you. The next thing is to send for and question them. In that case, my theory will, I think, prove perfectly correct."

It did. James Field and Mary Page, upon being cross-examined admitted their guilt, if so harsh a term can be applied to a love-prompted act of suppression. Their affection for Lionel Carew had induced them to conceal the will, which virtually disinherited him, and they had deemed themselves justified in so doing. The old servants' mis-directed zeal had placed the young man in a very untenable position, yet he left the task of rebuking them to Mr. Mellor. The affection and respect for himself which had prompted the act prevented him from uttering any reproofs.

The next day Mr. Mellor returned to town, and the search for Sir Eustace Carew's daughter commenced. It proved more difficult than the lawyer had anticipated. Beyond a certain stage in her history he failed to trace her. The lady with whom she had lived as companion could supply him with no clue to her present whereabouts. He was constrained at last to advertise for the missing heiress under the assumed name she had always borne.

The result of this search troubled Lionel Carew but little. He felt certain that it was merely question of time, that Miss Carew would eventually be found. He was making his arrangements to quit the Hall, and, the news of the discovery of a second will having somehow got abroad, the whole county was on tiptoe with wonder and expectancy.

One day the family solicitor paid Lionel Carew a visit.

"Well," said Mr. Mellor, after the usual greetings had passed between them, "I have news for you at last, Sir Lionel, news which I am unfeignedly sorry to impart. We have succeeded in finding Miss Carew."

"Indeed!" was the calm reply. "When does she—my cousin—arrive to take possession? I clear out to-morrow."

The solicitor smiled.

"Miss Carew appears to be in no hurry to assume her new position," he continued. "By the way, you remember the fictitious name, which she was taught to regard as her own? It was mentioned in the will."

"No; I grasped the broad facts when you read the will," said Lionel Carew, carelessly, "but I paid little heed to details. The name escaped me."

As the solicitor mentioned it Carew started violently; as he went on to relate the circumstances attending the discovery of the heiress, he listened with strained attention.

When Mr. Mellor ceased speaking Lionel Carew gave vent to a bitter laugh.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "that girl of all others! Why, it's the very irony of fate!"

(To be concluded in our next.)

It is reported that locomotive engineers who are deaf and under ordinary circumstances can hear perfectly while on their engines when running. We knew an old lady, a few years ago, who was very deaf except when she was in a moving railway car; then she could hear ordinary conversation as well as any.

## FACETIE.

In what place did the cock crow when all the world heard him? In Noah's ark.

You can't bring up a child in the right way unless you happen to be travelling that way yourself.

Why was Goliath surprised when he was struck by a stone? Because such a thing never entered his head before.

DOMESTIC HARMONY.—She: "Now mind the baby while I'm gone and don't let him get cross." He: "Certainly, I will do whatever you direct."

BUSINESS MAN: "Can I see one of the principals?" Confidential Clerk: "Sorry you can't, sir; for I'm afraid we have no principals in this office."

FOND MAMMA: "What are you drawing on your slate, pet?" Little Nell: "I was trying to draw my dolly; but I dear I'll tell it a clothes pin."

THE POPULAR THING.—Father: "What does your college course include?" Son (more fond of hunting than books): "A full mile straight away and return."

MISS C: "You ought to patronize my photographer. He is an artist." Brown: "Is that so?" "Yes, he can throw expression into the most commonplace face."

JACKSON: "You know that Solomon, the wisest of men, had 300 wives?" Bilkins: "Yes, but I fail to see where the wisdom comes in. I've got one and that's quite enough."

WHEN "Thirteen Ways of Popping the Question" can be bought at a bookstall for fivepence it is strange how much encouragement is required to draw one of these ways out of follow."

FRANCIMAN (proudly): "You have not in ze German empire anything so tall as ze great Eiffel tower." German (indignantly): "No, und you don't koot noddings so strong like Cherman sausage."

MRS. YOUNGWIFE: "I am so happy. My dear husband never goes out. He always sits at home with me in the evenings." Female Friend: "Yes, I have heard that he never cared for pleasure of any kind."

JINKS (at the circus): "Hello, Simpson, you here?" Simpson: "Yes; I had to come to take care of my little boy." Jinks: "Where's the boy?" Simpson: "He was taken ill at the last moment, and couldn't come."

EMPRESSA: "Are you watchful and prudent in looking after business interests?" Applicant for position: "I've married the same umbrella over two years without losing it or having it stolen." Employer: "Then you shall have entire control of my extensive business, and name your own salary."

SAM JOHNSON happened to pay a visit to the county jail a few days ago, and who should he see inside of the bars but Gabe Snodgrass. "How in de worl', Gabe, did yer git in dar?" asked Sam Johnson. "I doan' boddie my head 'bout dat ar, how I got in heah. How ter git out ob heah is what I wants ter tsik erabout."

"Why, my dear child, what is three thousand dollars a year? It wouldn't more than pay for your breakfasts and lunches. The engagement is out of the question." "Well, I'm sure, mother, that is enough. I never care for more than two meals a day, and if we are particularly hungry we can dine with our friends."

"Did Mr. Ganderson—er—speak to you, papa?" "Yes; he told me he had asked you to marry him, and you had consented; and then he wanted my permission." "And what did you say, papa, dear? You consented, of course?" "No. I told him if you had said 'yes' that settled it. Anything I might say or do wouldn't make the slightest difference."

At Sir Ralph's evening party.—Captain F. (brought by a friend): "Old Stick-in-the-Mud does the thing well, doesn't he? The supper alone must have cost him a guinea a head." Lady: "Twenty-two and sixpence, sir. I can give you the exact figures." "Why, how, what do you mean?" "Merely that I saw old Stick-in-the-Mud's daughter."

An old lady, visiting one of her friends, found a child of the latter, a mite of five or six years, sobbing bitterly, and apparently in great distress. "You shouldn't cry like that," said the visitor; "that's what makes little girls ugly!" Dolly looks up through her tears, gazes at the visitor, and replies: "What a lot you must have cried when you were a little girl."

LITTLE BOY: "Say, ma, says you are going to take sister off." Engaged youth (soon to be married): "Yes, in a few weeks she's going to my home, and my ma and pa will be her ma and pa. See!" "I see. Then she'll be your sister, same as she was mine. Say, don't you do anything she doesn't like, for if you do she'll hang you around awful when your pa and ma ain't looking."

THE BATHING SEASON.—Smith: "How do you do, Jones? Where have you been, and what have you been doing?" Jones: "Just got back (sic) from the coast. Bathing just splendid!" "You don't mean to say that you have been bathing already?" "Bathed five times this af'noon." "Five times!" "Yesh. Doctor don't (sic) low me to drink whisky 'cept when I'm chuffed from bathing. Watersh splendid! Going again to-morrow. Have jolly time."

COMPLAINING upon an advertisement of a new typewriter recommended as only weighing three pounds, and capable of being carried in the pocket, the *St. Louis Shoe and Leather Gazette*, observes:—"This is getting things down to fine. The old style typewriter that can be carried on the arm, of a rainy night, is as good as they can make 'em. About 120 lbs. to five feet four, is the right proportion. Of course, if the typewriter has large, dark-blue eyes and a pretty little mouth, so much the better."

"PA," plaintively pleaded petit Pierre, popularly known as "Pete," the other morning, "I really cannot go to school to-day. I ache all over." "Then you may stay at home," kindly responded Pete's father, who, despite his rough exterior, had a warm heart beating in his breast. "So you lied to me, you young rascal," fiercely exclaimed Pete's father when he saw petit Pierre fishing in the creek. "Don't hit so hard, pa," pleaded Pete, between whacks; "it was this I was aching for—to go fishing."

"Are you fond of autographs, Mrs. Mnah-room?" asked an pathetic young lady of the practical visitor. "No, I don't go much on 'em, but my son who's away at college has a big collection of the handwriting of great celebrities. I reckon I'll surprise him some when he gets back this summer." "In what way?" "Well, ya see, some of them celebs write such poor writin' that I had all the names copied off in a neat hand in a big book. You have no idee how much better they look. That other trick that nobody couldnt make out I just burred up."

CUSTOMER: "My watch won't go." Jeweller (examining it): "My! My! Have you been in a railroad collision?" Customer (surprised): "Why, no." Jeweller (solenly): "When you endrem you should not throw your wrist down on the floor when your watch is in your pocket." Customer (thoughtfully): "I never do. I have been exceedingly careful with that watch. Don't know how it got hurt. How long will it take you to fix it?" Jeweller (after another examination): "Would better leave it here at least a week; but if you can get along without it, I would advise two weeks." Customer: "Very well. Do it up right. Good-day." Jeweller (to assistant): "Hans, blow that spanker dust off this wheel, and charge up five dollars for repairs."

## SOCIETY.

The sensation of a recent New York wedding was the appearance of the groom attired in knickerbockers, large silver buckles on his patent leather gaiters, and full-dress coat and vest.

It is rumoured that the plain tailor-made style is going to be more correct than ever, directly fussy materials are put to flight by the advent of dull, damp weather.

The Shah's famous emerald is described as too big for effect, being about the size of an ordinary watch, and exactly like a bit of green glass.

A NUMBER of young women in Cheltenham have organised an anti-kissing society. Those who have seen the members say that such a precaution was not necessary.

The Giant Diamond, lately discovered in Cape Colony, and now at the Paris Exhibition, weighs 180 carats and is valued at about £600,000. It is kept in a glass case by itself and guardians stand around it all day. At night it is placed in a big safe, which is similarly guarded all night. It is said to be of the first water, and as pure as the famous Regent in the French Crown diamonds.

FENCING, it appears, is to be one of the next fashionable feminine pastimes. Does this portend, I wonder, a revival of the extinct "affair of honour," and, if so, will lady duellists call out masculine opponents and *vice versa*, or will these deadly attentions be confined to the gentle (?) sex, and what in the new woman's code will constitute a challengeable offence?

PRINCE ALBERT VICTOR manifests a pleasant feeling in his intercourse with his brother officers, allowing, as he does, no difference to be made between himself and them. He saunters into shops and makes his little purchases just as the humbllest of subalterns, or rather in a much more lowly manner, for whereas they have been known to give themselves airs and request a packet of envelopes to be sent to the barracks, Prince Albert Victor never has; but, on the contrary, carries his purchases home in his pocket.

A MADRID correspondent telegraphs:—The little King of Spain has taken his first sea bath at San Sebastian. His eldest sister, the Princess of the Asturias, carried him in her arms into the water, though she herself is only nine years old. Alfonso XIII. seemed delighted with his bath, and did not wish to return ashore, when a bather who was watching him in the water took him back to the beach.

It is true that the Queen has the newspapers read to her daily, but not indiscriminately. Copies of the papers are marked by a responsible person, so that the reader has not to exercise any discretion in the choice of her subjects. It was not so when the Prince Consort was alive, but since his death, the papers have always been marked before being put into the reader's hands. It is said to be at present part of the duty of Sir Henry Ponsonby, Her Majesty's most trusted friend and secretary, to thus "edit" the papers for the Queen's benefit.

The Queen has invited Princess Alix of Hesse to spend some time with her during this autumn. Princess Beatrice likes having one of her nieces with the Queen, as it relieves her to some extent from being obliged to be always with her Majesty, her husband and family now requiring somewhat more of her time and attention. Princess Alix is very bright, pleasant, and cheerful, and the Queen is very fond of her, as are also the other members of the Royal Family. One of them in particular is much devoted to the Princess; but the affection is not reciprocated, though some people who know express an opinion that more unlikely things may happen than her one day becoming a very exalted personage in England.

## STATISTICS.

DR. NANSEN, the explorer, says the ice in Greenland is 6,000 feet thick.

There are 342,000 miles of railroad in operation in the world, of which 181,000 are in America.

PAPIN, a native of France, who died in Germany in 1694, was the first man to make experiments on the power of steam.

PROFESSOR GUNNING estimates the average amount of water that passes over Niagara Falls at 18,000,000 cubic feet per minute. Allowing 62½ pounds to the cubic foot, this would give a total of 562,500 tons per minute, or 55,312,500 tons in forty-five minutes, of which somewhat more than two-thirds passes over the Horse-shoe Falls.

AN American paper says that in 1888 the Pope's income amounted to 2,500,000 dollars, of which over 1,700,000 dollars came from Peter's pence, and 800,000 dollars from the interest of money invested outside of Italy. This does not include the money presents, amounting to 2,800,000 dollars, which flocked in during the Pope's Jubilee.

## GEMS.

NEVER fear to bring the sublimest motive to the smallest duty, and the most infinite comfort to the smallest trouble.

ONLY the refined and delicate pleasures that spring from research and education can build up barriers between different ranks.

HE that will not permit his wealth to do any good to others while he is living prevents it from doing any good to himself when he is dead, and by an egotism that is suicidal and has a double edge, cuts himself off from the truest pleasure here and the highest happiness hereafter.

IT is hard for a haughty man ever to forgive one that has caught him in a fault, and whom he knows has reason to complain of him; his resentment never subsides till he has regained the advantage he has lost and found means to make the other do him equal wrong.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

COOKS may be made air and water-tight by keeping them for five minutes under melted paraffin. They must be kept down with a wire screen.

TAPISSA FRUIT PUDDING.—One half cup of tapioca soaked over night in one quart of cold water. In the morning cover the bottom of the baking dish with any kind of fruit, either canned or fresh; sweeten the tapioca with one half cup of sugar, add a little salt and nutmeg, pour over the fruit, and bake one hour. Serve with sauce.

FAIRY CAKE.—One pound of butter, one of sugar, one of figs, one of citron, four pounds of currants, one of raisins, one cup of molasses, one cup of brandy or wine, one large spoonful of cloves, cinnamon, mace, and three nutmegs, eight eggs. This cake improves by keeping, and is very rich and delicious. If preferred, the brandy can be omitted.

PRESERVED PEARS.—To each pound and a half of pears allow one pound of loaf-sugar, a gill of water, the juice and rind of a quarter lemon, and a tiny bit of whole ginger. Make a syrup of this, boiling and skimming for half an hour. Then put in the pears (previously peeled) and boil twenty minutes, take them up carefully and boil the syrup by itself ten minutes longer. If colouring is liked, put in a few drops of cochineal, put back the pears, just give them another boil; bottle while hot.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

IT has been stated that the lamented Father Damien attributed his leprosy to the inoculation, through the agency of flies, of an abrasion in the scalp.

THE magpie is deemed a bird of evil omen on both sides of the borders. Its unluckiness has been accounted for by its being the only bird which did not go into the ark with Noah.

THE raising of canary birds is suggested as a new occupation for women. Care and neatness are the chief requisites, and there is little expense involved after the purchase of the parent birds.

THE Forth Bridge is rapidly approaching completion, and at the meeting of the shareholders in Edinburgh recently, Lord Colville announced that it would be open for passenger traffic in the beginning of 1890.

TO lose sound of the voice of the person addressing you, to have the room pass in a misty blur before your eyes, and to sink into utter oblivion for about ten minutes, is called "yawning" by very polite people.

IN Persia, when a man is convicted of robbery, they put him in a brick tank by the roadside, pour plaster of Paris around him till he is suffocated, and leave him standing there hermetically sealed up as a warning to all who pass that way.

THE tinfoil so commonly used to wrap Neufchâtel cheese, chewing gum, various kinds of candy, and all kinds of chewing tobacco, is said to be dangerous on account of the lead in it. Its use for wrapping articles of food has been forbidden in France.

THE very latest invention consists of a contrivance whereby hollow cheeks, and other ravages of time, are hidden by the insertion of artificial pads, fixed by springs to the teeth, calculated to supply the lost roundness of face, and to add to the many deceptions practised by the (an)fair sex.

THE demand for false hair at the present day is very great. We can get some idea of the magnitude of the traffic from the fact that the hair merchants of London alone import five tons of hair annually, and that the Parisian dealers harvest annually upward of two hundred pounds of hair a year. It is mostly black hair, and is collected in Brittany and the south of France.

BOOKS were scarce in Puritan days, and perhaps that is the reason that the writers made the most of the titles, using such choice ones as "A Reaping Hook Well Tempered for the Stubborn Ears of the Coming Crop, or Biscuits Baked in the Oven of Charity, Carefully Conserved for the Chickens of the Church, the Sparrows of the Spirit, and the Sweet Swallows of Salvation;" "A Pair of Bellows to Blow off the Dust Cast Upon John Fry."

A NEW employment of a decidedly curious nature is suggested by an advertisement which appeared a few days ago in the columns of the *Morning Post*, and which informed parents that "unruly girls and boys of any age" could, for a small fee, be "visited and punished at their own home by a thorough disciplinarian." One is tempted to wonder whether the author of this extraordinary advertisement is serious or whether it is simply an eccentric joke.

A REMEDY for sleeplessness is recommended by an Englishman, which is said to have proved efficacious in many cases. It is to lie on the right side, with the head so placed on the pillow that the neck shall be straight; keeping the lips closed tightly, a full inspiration is to be taken through the nostrils, and the lungs are then to be left to their action. The person must now imagine that he sees the breath streaming in and out of his nostrils, and confine his attention to that idea. This method is said to be infallible, if properly carried out.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

—O—

J. B.—The lady is single so far as we know.

W. W. H.—Cousins of any degree may marry.

A SAILOR'S LASS.—We never heard of such a ship.

SQUARE GUM.—You should apply to a medical man at once.

FRANK'S DARLING.—We have no information on the subject.

H. L.—You must have a license for the sale of methylated spirits.

G. F. F.—The Balaklava Charge was on the 25th of October, 1854, during the Crimean War.

BELLA BREW.—You had better take your dress to a good dyer; home dyeing is seldom a success.

G. S.—The young lady has a fine expressive face and nice eyes. If phrenology goes for anything she should be clever.

SILVERSMITH.—Not being acquainted with the firm in question we cannot give you any information concerning them.

FAIR ANNIE.—We never give any information about persons as articles of toilet use; you had better avoid them altogether.

BERTHA.—Not knowing you we can hardly give an opinion; if you are as you say a blonde, blue should be becoming to you.

MILES' BOY.—1. You write a very good hand. 2. James, from the Hebrew, means a supplanter; William, German, defending many.

ROBERT DAVIDSON.—We really cannot advise you. Your only way of obtaining such introductions as you wish will be through personal friends.

LOVING COUPLE.—A boy and girl of that age have no business to be thinking of such things; they are neither of them properly out of the schoolroom.

MADCAP.—Arsenic should never be used in the way you speak of. It is an extremely dangerous habit, and likely to lead to most disastrous results.

SHOOTER.—1. Nothing but practice will bring about the effect you want. 2. You had better ask one of your friends. 3. The writing is good and legible.

G. BECK.—The debtor usually pays whatever expenses the creditor is put to in obtaining the money, unless there are exceptional circumstances in the case.

QUEEN MAB.—Your question is foolish. Any girl with a grain of common sense would know how to reply to such a simple question as "How do you do?"

A COUNTRY LASS.—We should not advise you to come on chance. You might find yourself adrift in London, and have difficulty in discovering what you want.

FLORA.—1. A lady should never seek the acquaintance of a gentleman who has made no advances towards her. 2. The gentleman is always introduced to the lady.

ALEX.—Your letter is so illegible, and your question so oddly worded, that between the calligraphy and the grammar we cannot find out what it is that you want to know.

ONLY SEVENTH (Cheshire).—Let well alone. It is not by any means undesirable at your age, and in every probability shows a good constitution, which is a blessing exceeded by none.

STRUGGLING WIDOW.—If you took your house by the month, and had paid the rent as agreed upon, monthly, your landlord cannot claim a quarter's notice; so leave at the end of the month.

MELANCHOLY.—Your letter is a little rambling, and it is difficult to understand what you really wish to know. If you have been once properly married at church by banns, you cannot be married over again.

DESPAIRING MAUDE.—There does not seem much reason for despair as yet; a young lady of nineteen can hardly be called an old maid. You must have patience; if the gentleman loves you, you will soon find it out.

OLD SOLDIER.—Nothing can be done if the woman was married without leave; Government does not recognise wives in that unlucky position. 2. Try rubbing the spots with turpentine; it should take them out.

SAM.—If the ivory has grown yellow with age and the ordinary methods of cleaning will not restore it. Show your glasses to a worker in the trade; if they can be restored you can get all information about them in that way.

M. T.—Farthings are rather troublesome things to get rid of in any quantity; they are only a legal tender up to one shilling in value. It would be better for your little boy to turn his hoard into some more useful coin as he accumulates it.

QUEENIE.—Mix soap lye and quicklime to the consistency of cream, and lay it thickly on the marble, leave it four-and-twenty hours, and clean afterwards with soap and water. It will remove every stain and leave the marble looking fresh and new.

BURGESS.—It seems pretty sure that there was such a person as "Mother Shipton," and that she lived to a good old age in one of the northern counties. She may have made some of the odd prophecies attributed to her, but most of the sayings published as hers appear to have been concocted for the times as they have gone by since her day.

MOLLY DARLING.—About a wineglassful mixed to the consistency of cream. Let it stand till the sulphur has settled and use only the milk from the top; rub it on the face before washing. Make fresh at least every second day, as the milk turns putrid and offensive.

A READER.—Art muslins will not always wash, but the majority of them will; those that do not will come out pretty fresh next season if you shake them well and fold them up smooth before putting them away. The soft tints of the material do not show the dirt much, and dust shakes off the loose muslin very fairly.

ONE IN A FIX.—There should be nothing sentimental in business; the gentlesman is your fellow clerk, and you should treat him as such. There is no occasion for any awkwardness if you do not make it. Just greet him when you enter as you would any one else, and then attend to your own business and leave him to his.

KATHLEEN MAVOURNEEN.—Your verses are hardly suitable for printing. The sentiment is pretty, but you will need a good deal of practice before you can do anything fit for publication. MSS. for publication, should be legibly written on one side of the paper only. We should advise you to wait a year or two before attempting anything so large as a novel.

ALMA BROWN.—The dress you inquire about would look odd anywhere except at a fancy dress ball; the crass for baby costumes has gone out, and the aesthetic nonsense is a thing of the past. No lady who cares for her appearance aims at anything eccentric in costume; to be really well dressed you should be in no way peculiar; the general effect should be considered, not any special garment or style.

DELICATE JANE.—It is hard to tell what will suit another person; warm water agrees with some best, cold with others. We always advise any one who can bear it to persevere in the use of cold water; if you suffer from lassitude and want of energy it should be the best thing for you. Try what a little resolution will do; make up your mind to exert yourself and you will find fresh air and exercise the best medicines after all.

## SHUT IN!

Groping about my prison walls,  
The four blank walls that mock me so,  
My spirit beats her useless wings,  
Imploring, for she longs to go!Through the small casement shines one ray  
Of that bright sun I see no more—  
Oh, how I love that golden thread!  
That streams athwart my prison floor!It comes, ah me! but once a day,  
That spark of hope, that ray of cheer;  
It stays a moment, then—how dark!  
And yet each time it grows more dear.One precious square of heaven's own blue,  
And then, a handful of bright stars  
As night brings in her breath of dew  
Across my envious prison bars.Shut in! and yet how good is God,  
That gives e'en in the darkest night  
Some cheering ray, some foretaste sweet,  
Of heaven's eternal glory bright.

M. A.

IGNORANT.—August was so called in honour of Augustus Caesar; not because it was his birth-month, but because it was the month in which he entered upon his first consulship, celebrated three triumphs, received the oath of allegiance from the legions which occupied the Janiculum—one of the armed positions on the further side of the Tiber, which prohibited approach to Rome—reduced Egypt, and put an end to the civil wars.

LADY LESTER.—It is an old proverb that "there is many a true word spoken in jest," and it is equally true that many a stinging and embittering word is spoken in jest. In fact, jesting is a dangerous business, and one into which no man should freely enter, lest he should become bankrupt in friendship. Your experience is a common one. All you can now do is to treat the lady with all possible politeness and kindness, and trust to time to heal the wound which you so unwittingly inflicted.

ONLY A COOK.—From your own showing you appear to have been in the wrong, and your mistress must be very forbearing and gentle with her servants to put up with what seems, from your letter, to have been impudent, to say the least of it. Every lady has a right to dictate to her servants what they shall wear in the house, and she naturally objects to fancy caps and curled fringes while you are about your duties with her. If you do not like the rules of the house, you have the remedy in your own hands and can go elsewhere.

EDITH B.—You will be acting very foolishly in marrying a soldier in the ranks unless he has permission to take a wife, or you have sufficient means to live without any recognition from the authorities. Even if you are independent, the life of an unrecognised wife is not a pleasant one, and the few privileges allowed to women on the strength of the regiment are not to be despised. We should advise you to consider the matter well before you enter on what at best is a doubtful and uncomfortable position. You had better wait till your sweetheart can get permission to marry; and if he is a steady, well-conducted soldier, and can show that he is going to take a respectable, industrious wife, he will get it in time.

ALAN LADISLAS.—The Staked Plains are table-lands in Mexico. They received that name from the fact that a party of Mexicans travelled from Santa Fe to San Antonio many years ago and set stakes on the way to guide them back. They are not a barren desert; grass is abundant, especially the mesquinet, and travellers have found wild plum-trees loaded with fruit. Buffaloes formerly grazed upon these plains, and stockmen have now an eye upon this portion of the globe hitherto supposed to be of little worth to producers.

DEVENIE.—Jewellers mark the fineness or the purity of any alloy of gold by supposing it to be divided into twenty-four equal parts called carats (the weight of four grains), its fineness being according to the number of parts of pure gold in these twenty-four parts. For instance, gold eighteen carats fine has in it eighteen parts of pure gold and six parts of other metal. Jewellers usually spell this word karat, and mark gold with a K, and the figures marking the number of carats. Thus gold of eighteen carats is commonly marked K 18.

DOLLY.—1. You are by no means too stout for a girl of seventeen; no girl should have a waist less than twenty-two inches, but you are very short. Are you sure you have given your real height? 2. If you wish to get thinner take plenty of open air exercise, and avoid malt liquor and farinaceous food as much as possible. 3. Your friends had better take the advice of a solicitor. 4. You write a fairly good hand. 5. You must be guided by the lady's tastes and position, and your own means. 6. You should say "my sister," mentioning her name also.

FRO AND DOT.—Dreams arise from many causes, and when a person is out of health, mentally or bodily. They often arise from fatigue of all kinds, and are by no means always the result of heavy eating at night. In many cases going to bed on an empty stomach will produce far more frightful nightmares and distressing dreams than the most indigestible supper; it is all a matter of constitution and circumstance. In your case it might be well for you to consult a medical man about your health; but above all things avoid the notion that your odd sleeping fancies are "warnings," or anything of that sort.

S. U. T. B.—The presence of the registrar is not necessary at a marriage in Scotland. His attendance can be secured, if desired, on payment of a fee of one pound. Banns must be published three times in the parish church, whether the parties belong to the established church or not; the session clerk is the officer to apply to, and the person applying must certify that he has resided six weeks in the parish, that the parties wishing to marry are not related to each other in an unsuitable degree, and are unmarried. After the publication of banns, the marriage can take place anywhere and at any time, and can be performed by any minister of religion. Scotch marriages are usually celebrated at home where the parties are Presbyterians; Episcopalian and Roman Catholics generally marry in their own churches.

ANEMONE.—A pleasant, intelligent face, with quite enough good sense in it to prevent you from doing anything foolish. Your brother is acting very wisely in stipulating that you should wait a little before engaging yourself to the gentleman, who seems from what you say to be rather lukewarm in the business. If he shows any more of the vacillating spirit you speak of, "whistle him down the wind," and let him go; there are plenty of men as good as he in the world who will appreciate you better. There was no harm in giving him a present while you believed yourself engaged to him. Do nothing in haste; wait till you see what his intentions really are—but while you are walking and corresponding with him have nothing to do with any other young man; one sweetheart at a time is quite enough for any young girl who has any self-respect.

A HARD WORKING GIRL.—Your question is rather comprehensive; it is very difficult to give any real advice on the subject of emigration; there are so many things to be considered. If you are healthy and really fond of hard work, and are not afraid of roughing it in a new country, you will stand a chance of getting on; but if it is workers of all sorts that are wanted in the colonies, and not girls who go out with the idea that they are going to earn a great deal of money for doing very little. You would be of great use on a Canadian farm, and probably earn good wages, but you would have to do very hard and rough work to earn your money. It would be the same in the country districts in Australia; the towns are plentifully supplied with workers of all sorts. If you are in earnest in your wish to quit this country write or go to the Emigration Enquiry Office, Broadway, Westminster; you will get all information and advice there.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 231, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post free, Eightpence Also Vol. LIII., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

••• ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 234, Strand, W.C.

••• We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 234, Strand, by J. R. SPEAR; and Printed by WOODFALL and KIMBLE, 76 to 78, Long Acre, W.C.